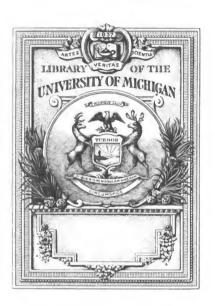


To face p. s.

Real conversations

William Archer







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LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN.

Real Conversations

Recorded by
William Archer

(With twelve Portraits)



London William Heinemann

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To

G. R. H.

OLDEST OF FRIENDS

MOST LONG-SUFFERING OF EDITORS

AND

"THE ONLIE BEGETTER OF THESE INSUING"
CONVERSATIONS

Replace Soth 9-30-25

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An Imaginary Conversation with the Courteous Reader.

- C. R. Do you flatter yourself, my good sir, that you can disguise that vulgarest of newspaper devices, the Interview, by simply re-christening it? What, pray, is the difference between an Interview and a Conversation?
- W. A. I am not without hope that, if you will glance at one or two of the Conversations recorded in these pages, you may discern a certain difference between them and the ordinary Interview of journalism—for which, however, I by no means share your contempt.
- C. R. I perceive, indeed, in merely turning the pages, that the part assigned to "W. A." is not inconsiderable. In some places it would even seem that his interlocutor finds it difficult to get a word in edgewise. It is, I admit, a somewhat unconventional interviewer who does most of the talking himself.
- W. A. With admirable acumen, you have gone straight to the point of distinction, as I understand it, between the Interview and the Conversation. The Interviewer seeks merely to draw his subject out—to lure him on, by an occasional leading question—
 - C. R. —into indiscretion, if possible.
- W. A. Furthermore, the interviewer does not, as a rule, profess to take any personal view of the subject in hand. No discussion, no colloquial give-and-take, is ever attempted. Now, it seemed to me that an actual

exchange of ideas between two people equally interested in the subject or subjects of their discussion (however unequal their knowledge and faculty) would be a new thing, and perhaps not unattractive. The Interview we know, and the fictitious Philosophic Dialogue we know—but the faithful record of a Real Conversation is (or so it seemed to me) a thing not often attempted.

- C. R. There was once a gentleman named Boswell——
- W. A. Nay, my dear sir—is this candid? is this generous? There was once a Velasquez—yet the portrait-painter (nay, even the photographer) of today, if he goes honestly about his work, has a right to exist, unannihilated by perfection.
- C. R. Do I understand you to imply that these "records" of yours have anything like the accuracy of photography? Are they verbatim reports of the colloquies in question?
- W. A. Verbatim reports—no. Faithful reproductions—yes. In only one case were the services of a shorthand-writer called in; and I do not think that in that case the Conversation, as it stands in these pages, is any more literally exact than its neighbours. Compression and selection were necessary in every instance. A great deal more was said than I could or would reproduce. Some of my interlocutors did me the honour to say things which they knew I would not set down—

Cose che 'l tacere è bello, Sì com' era 'l parlar colà dov' era.

The topics did not always present themselves in pre-

cisely the order in which they now appear. The transitions were not always exactly as they are here represented. But nothing is set down that was not really said; and although—being no mimic—I may here and there have unwittingly imposed my own vocabulary and forms of speech upon my interlocutor, I aver with some confidence that I have in all cases faithfully represented his (or her) attitude of mind during the two or three hours he (or she) was good enough to bestow upon me. Was not this effort worth the making?

- C. R. How can I say until I have read the book? I will try to approach it with an open mind; yet I cannot conceal from you my initial prejudice against everything that savours of the Interview. It is a symbol of the intrusiveness and obtrusiveness—complementary vices—of a babbling age. I could almost prefer the old Paul Pry, who was content to peep at your keyhole, to his latter-day successor who comes tapping at your brain.
- W. A. Beware of epigram! It is one of Satan's favourite disguises. Surely no form in which thought and feeling can be conveyed from man to man is wholly to be contemned; and the greater the variety of forms at our command, the better equipped, so to speak, is our intellectual armoury. Along with the Essay, the Treatise, the fictitious Dialogue, the Speech, the Poem, I suggest that the Conversation has a right to take its place—subordinate, no doubt, but far from despicable. These pages contain a series of experiments in which certain distinguished men and women have most generously aided me in trying to make good

4 AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION

the capabilities of a form hitherto but little cultivated. If we have failed, the fault is entirely mine: it lies neither with my interlocutors, nor with the form. That, I am confident, will one day be perfected by some more skilful recorder, who will take warning, perhaps, by my errors. And even if I have failed to give the true artistic touch to my records, I cannot but believe that, for many a day to come, some one here and there will be found to value these unvarnished jottings of what, at certain moments in the first years of the twentieth century, certain men and women of the time were thinking, feeling, and saying.

C. R. You appeal, then, to posterity?

W. A. In right of my interlocutors, I do. And in their name, too, I appeal for, at least, a suspension of prejudice, to you, the Courteous Reader of to-day.

October 7, 1903.



To face p. .

MR. A. W. PINERO.

From a photograph by Langlér, Ltd., Glasgow.

Conversation I. With Mr. Arthur W. Pinero.

Scene: Mr. Pinero's study. Time: The other evening. Discovered, Mr. Pinero and a beautiful tan-coloured collie. To them enter W. A.

- W. A. (stroking the dog). What! Is this Cibber?
- Mr. Pinero. The veritable Colley Cibber.
- W. A. When I was last here I was afraid to ask for him. I thought he was probably dead of old age.
- Mr. Pinero. He has apoplectic strokes every now and then, but they don't seem to do him much harm. He is going into the country to-morrow to recruit—to Stratford-on-Avon.
- W. A. To do penance at Shakespeare's tomb for his name-father's outrage on *Richard III.?*
- Mr. Pinero. Alas, poor Shakespeare! He has had to undergo the inspirations of far more ruthless collaborators than Cibber. Think of Tate's dealings with King Lear! Or Dryden's with The Tempest, for that matter.
- W. A. The penalty of being "not for an age, but for all time."
- Mr. Pinero. And do you think the adaptors who mutilated his text were the most injurious collaborators he has had to suffer from? I sometimes wonder whether, in these days of reverence for every misprint in the Folio, we are not apt to sacrifice the spirit to the letter.
 - W. A. If you mean that the people who would cut

nothing that can possibly be spoken are quite as foolish as the people who would speak nothing that can possibly be cut, I cordially agree with you.

Mr. Pinero. I am shocked to hear such iconoclastic sentiments from your lips. Did I not once sit out a lecture of yours on the necessity for a theatre that should play Shakespeare, all Shakespeare, and nothing but Shakespeare?

W. A. Oh no; that is Mr. Sidney Lee's theatre, not mine.

Mr. Pinero. And then you said our present theatres were like gin-palaces, or words to that effect.

W. A. Again I protest. Speaking of provincial playhouses, I said they were usually sandwiched between two public-houses, from which they were distinguishable mainly by their flaunting posters and some hideous flare of gas. As for our London theatres, I said they were at best like swagger restaurants.

Mr. Pinero. Gin-palaces!

W. A. Let us halve the difference—perhaps I said taverns.

Mr. Pinero. But what a monstrous exaggeration! Look, for instance, at Her Majesty's!

W. A. Precisely my point!—the handsomest theatre in London, and a mere annexe to an hotel.

Mr. Pinero. It has no more to do with the hotel than a chapel which adjoins a baker's has to do with Bath buns. However, look at the Haymarket, the St. James's, the Garrick, Wyndham's—all seemly, commodious buildings as any one can want. Look at the Lyceum: is that like a gin-palace?

W. A. No; I apologise. More like a sarcophagus.

Mr. Pinero. And then, for comfort, compare our theatres with the French!

W. A. Pardon me: that was not what I was talking about. Except for the disgraceful closeness of the rows of stalls, and consequent sense of imprisonment in your seat, our theatres are certainly far more comfortable internally than the Parisian theatres. But the point of my lecture was to contrast German, not French, theatrical architecture with English. The good modern theatre is made in Germany. Besides, I was speaking more of exterior design than of interior comfort—though even there the Germans are well ahead of us.

Mr. Pinero. Possibly. You made great play, I remember, with the Vienna Burgtheater. Well, it is a fine building, no doubt; but let me tell you my exhilarating experience of theatre-going at the Burg. We arrived late one evening, my wife and I,—the play was perhaps half over. What play it was I don't know to this day, for there were no flaunting posters herenot a bill of any sort to show what was going on. There was no sign of life about the theatre, externally. We pushed open a solemn swing-door, and found ourselves in an echoing vestibule. The pay-boxes were all closed, and a soldier or gendarme, sitting on a stool asleep, was the solitary occupant of the hall. It was like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. We awoke the official, and said we wanted to go into the theatre. He was very angry at being disturbed, and simply waved his hand in the direction of another swing-door. In we went, and passed reverently on through the deserted corridors, until at last we encountered an old

woman—presumably the Sleeping Beauty's nurse. We had no ticket or anything—there was nowhere to get one; but I said we wanted to see the play. She ushered us into a box; I tipped her, and there we were. The house was half empty, the audience seemingly asleep, and the actors acting in a dream. At the end of the scene the curtain fell, to a solitary mechanical clap; and we arose and fled, past the sleeping gendarme, into the waking world again. To the best of my belief, he is sleeping there still.

- W. A. Like Barbarossa in his cavern. Well, you hit on an unlucky evening. At any rate, there seems to be no inherent connection between fine architecture and dulness.
- Mr. Pinero. And then I'm told that, for all the boasted German appreciation of Shakespeare, they act him very badly, and the people don't go to see him.
- W. A. Rather a sweeping statement, but not quite without foundation. Still, you must have noticed—and surely you don't think it an insignificant fact—that you cannot take a ten minutes' stroll in the streets of a German city of any importance, without coming upon a stately and dignified building—standing free on all sides, and occupying one of the best sites of the town—which proclaims itself, in its architectural features, a theatre and nothing but a theatre: not a gin-palace, nor a tavern, nor a restaurant, nor a hotel, nor even a town-hall or museum—
- Mr. Pinero (interrupting). But isn't it too often a museum of dramatic fossils?
 - W. A. Stop a bit! You have had the stage for the

last ten minutes—now the limelight is on me! And seeing such a building—seeing the art with which you are connected by a double tie nobly housed in a public institution, placed on a footing of manifest equality with her sister arts of painting and sculpture—have you not, I say, felt that this was its rightful eminence, as opposed to its half-skulking, half-flaunting situation in England? And have you not longed to see a similar object-lesson—an object-lesson both for the classes and the masses—among the public buildings of London and of every great centre of the English-speaking race?

Mr. Pinero. Is that my cue? Ah! I thought so. I seemed to recognise the peroration of your lecture. Well, while you are taking breath, I may say that, supposing the funds forthcoming, I have no objection whatever to your ideal theatre, except that I do not see who is to run it. The practical men who might do so are not available, and the faddists and cranks who are available by the score would empty the finest theatre that was ever built.

W. A. Solitudinem faciunt, artem appellant, eh? Well, I admit you have put your finger on the weak spot of every scheme for a Repertory Theatre. The money is not the real difficulty. That would soon be found, if we could first find the right organiser and manager. Why is it, I wonder, that we don't seem to produce the right type of man—the man of literary tact and training, who has also the practical instinct of the theatre, and the power of mastering its details? Such men abound in Germany—why have we none here?

Mr. Pinero. I'll tell you why: it is because of the never-ending English jealousy of the theatre. People have made up their minds that the theatre and literature have not, and shall not have, anything in common. Your man of letters will rail at the theatre, on hearsay, whenever he gets a chance; but he won't study it, he won't understand it, he won't help it. He won't discriminate between the dramatists who strive honestly and faithfully, in spite of a hundred impediments, to do the best work that is in them, and the catchpenny imitators whose one idea of art is "sailing near the wind." How can you expect light and leading from men of wilful and invincible ignorance?

W. A. Believe me, I don't. And another point: the German Herr Direktor has a long-established tradition to back him; an Englishman in the same position would have no tradition to back him, no precedents to guide him, and would have to fight against all sorts of scepticism——

Mr. Pinero. ——and against the Press—don't forget that: against the undercurrent of petty criticism—against the hundred-and-one gentlemen who make it their business to write up this, and write down that, and always to know "what the public wants," as though the public would never have more than one dish on the theatrical table. An idyllic play succeeds: "Ah!" cry the paragraphists, "the public wants nothing but sentiment." A plume-and-sword melodrama makes a hit: "Oh, joy!" cry the paragraphists; "the era of romance has come again! The public wants nothing but duels and abductions!" I don't know much of the German Press, but I'm sure the

buzz of the mosquito note-writer can't be such a nuisance there as it is here.

- W. A. No, it isn't. Their whole theatrical life runs on seemlier lines than ours. And, believe me, that is largely because the theatre is with them an honoured public institution (supplemented, of course, by private enterprises), while with us it is merely a private enterprise, an appendage to hotels and restaurants—
- Mr. Pinero (interrupting). Back to your gin-palace again, eh? But now look at the matter in another light. Don't you think there is a very admirable side to this thoroughly English system of private enterprise—of individual endeavour—which you are denouncing? It develops character—it gives a personal quality to art—it fills our theatrical history with great figures. Abroad, the man is merged in the institution; here, the institution is the man. Don't you see something fine in that?
- W. A. My dear fellow, there is nothing on earth, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter, for which some sort of a case cannot be made. Slavery, polygamy, autocracy, anarchy—all have their good points. In renouncing any one of them you have always to make some sacrifice. Nothing is wholly evil or wholly good; but the world progresses by going for the balance of advantage.
- Mr. Pinero. No doubt. The thing is to find out where the balance of advantage lies; and I am not sure that in this matter it does not lie with us. Who was the greatest figure in the theatrical history of modern Europe—the great poets, of course, apart? Who but David Garrick, an English actor-manager?

What other country has produced such striking actorindividualities as Betterton, Quin, John Kemble, Macready? Can you point to a more admirable episode in all theatrical history than Phelps's energetic and gallant campaign at Sadler's Wells?

W. A. If we lived in history, I should admit the force of that argument. But we live in the present, not in the past. What I want is a worthy English theatre in the present, not the memory of gallant campaigns (that ended in failure) fifty years ago.

- Mr. Pinero. Well, then, take the present—that is to say, times within our own recollection. Look at the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales's! What an achievement that was! I tell you, my dear Archer, when things come to be seen in their true perspective, T. W. Robertson will be recognised as one of the most notable artists of last century. What did he do? With no traditions to help him, no models to copy, he invented a new art, developed a new method of reproducing life upon the stage. But, though he had no traditions to help him, he was not without allies. What was it that enabled him to do his lifework? Why, nothing but the intelligence, the sympathy, the enthusiasm—in short, the private enterprise -of two actor-managers: Marie Wilton and Squire Bancroft!
- W. A. Hear, hear! I quite agree. I never said that private enterprise had produced no good results; and I would be the last to restrict private enterprise, even if such a thing were possible at this time of day. But——
 - Mr. Pinero. And then look at the career of Henry

Irving! What a romance of theatrical history! Think of that young actor coming to the front with nothing, absolutely nothing, except genius, to help him-finding the poetical drama dead, or droning miserably on to empty benches-reviving it at the touch of his magnetic personality-showing us in his Hamlet (the most intellectual performance of our time) that Shakespeare spelt neither boredom nor ruin-creating that great institution the Lyceum Theatre (an institution if you like!) and carrying its whole vast weight, year out, year in, on his single shoulders-faltering a moment through accidental misfortune (illness, fire, one or two unlucky ventures), but coming up smiling and indomitable, in spite of his sixty years, to retrieve whatever ground he had lost! I say it is an inspiring, heroic story—such a story as your Théâtre-Français, and all your Stadttheaters and Hoftheaters put together, don't give to the world!

W. A. Granted, granted. Sir Henry Irving is an extraordinary individuality, and extraordinary individualities—Rachel, Sarah Bernhardt, Coquelin, Duse, Irving—will always burst the bonds of a public institution, even where one exists, and create institutions of their own.

Mr. Pinero. So that your Repertory Theatre is fore-doomed to be the home of mediocrity!

W. A. An unworthy gibe, sir! You know very well that there is an immense interval between "star" genius and mediocrity. Was the Comédie Française a home of mediocrity even after Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin had flown off into space?—with Got, Delaunay, Mounet-Sully, Worms, Thiron, Maubant, Bartet,

Reichemberg, Samary, Baretta, Pauline Granger, and a dozen other fine actors left in the company?

- Mr. Pinero. But, after all, what is it you want? You admit that, in spite of all your grumblings, the English theatre has been going ahead. Haven't I read various articles of yours celebrating the advance of the modern drama during the past twenty years, and pitching into the people who ventured to question it? And as for Shakespeare, you can't say that he is neglected, with not only Sir Henry Irving, but Mr. Tree and Mr. Benson, and now Mr. Lewis Waller, industriously cultivating him?
- W. A. Well, you have given your reading of the situation, from the individual-enterprise point of view—now let me give mine. It is, briefly, that the abuse we want to correct is precisely this extreme and exclusive development of individuality, this constant identification of every great theatre with one actor, to whom it serves as a mere mount and frame. There are some actors, as I have just admitted—and Sir Henry Irving is no doubt one of them—who could flourish under no other system. But in the majority of cases it is no less hurtful to the actor himself than to art as a whole.

Mr. Pinero. How do you make that out?

- W. A. In the first place, to go back to what you said about Garrick:—Remember, please, that neither Garrick, nor Kemble, nor even Macready, was an actormanager in the same sense in which, say, Beerbohm Tree is an actor-manager.
- Mr. Pinero. I know that they had a monopoly to help them—if that is what you mean—and that Beerbohm Tree hasn't.

- W. A. To help them, yes-but also to impose an obligation upon them. Their monopoly amounted to an unwritten mandate, saying-" In consideration of your exclusive right to play tragedy and comedy (as opposed to burletta and melodrama) you are bound to do the best you can for the drama all round, not merely to exploit your own genius, however great it may be." Garrick, as a matter of fact, was only the leader of a company, several of whom, both men and women, were almost of equal rank with himself. He was compelled by tradition and by policy to keep a large repertory afoot, thus giving his subordinates ample opportunity to learn their art and develop their talent. He did not wear out his own talent, and keep other actors back, by appearing every night of the season and playing all the leading parts himself. In short, he could not, if he would, have made the vast machine of Drury Lane nothing but a picture-frame for his own individuality.
- Mr. Pinero. Whereas Beerbohm Tree could not, if he would, do anything else—you must remember that. But if you think the modern actor-manager has no idea beyond self-glorification and money-making, I believe you are mistaken. It is the fine thing that attracts him, not the merely paying thing; though sometimes he has to fall back on the paying thing when the fine thing has not paid. And you cannot say but what Tree has surrounded himself with good actors, and has given them as much opportunity for self-development as the nature of the case permitted.
- W. A. I know it. I am far from blaming Mr. Tree. He has managed his great theatre—conducted his arduous enterprise—with admirable spirit and liberality.

He is not responsible for the evil system—he is its victim. The public identifies the theatre wholly and solely with Beerbohm Tree, and would neither appreciate nor understand any attempt on his part to step out of the frame, or take, for however short a time, a place in the background of the picture.

Mr. Pinero. Then if no one is to blame—for you surely don't blame the public, "you cannot indict a nation"—what on earth do you complain of?

W. A. Why, of the system—the system which forces an actor either to spend all his life revolving round some other actor who holds the lime-lit centre of the stage, or else to seize the centre of the stage for himself and hold it in defiance of all comers, and in defiance, often, of the real nature of his own talent.

Mr. Pinero. But how did this deleterious "system" ever come into existence? If the other was better, how did the inferior system happen to supplant it?

W. A. The other was probably better in its day, though the conditions were so different that the comparison is rather idle. But the monopoly system inevitably broke down under the immense increase of population in the first half of the late lamented century. It was practically a dead letter in the days of Macready's management, which failed because he wouldn't recognise the fact—because he clung desperately to the tradition which forbade him to use his theatre as a machine for exploiting himself alone.

Mr. Pinero. Wasn't it he that produced The Lady of Lyons and Richelieu?

W. A. Certainly.

Mr. Pinero. Well, didn't he cast himself not only for Richelieu but for Claude Melnotte, though he must have been well on for fifty, and must have had several young men in his company who could have played it quite well? And wasn't it he himself, and no other, that played Macbeth, and Lear, and Henry V., and Coriolanus—all the leading parts, in fact?

W. A. Yes, the present system was creeping in. Macready's subordinates got far fewer great chances than Garrick's, though far more than fall to the lot of a subordinate actor of to-day. Above all things, Macready never would give in to the long run. If he would have "boomed" The Lady of Lyons and Richelieu and his Shakespearean revivals, and run them for all they were worth, he might have come out of his experiment a rich man. With his management, the monopoly system came to an end—it was abolished by Act of Parliament a year or two later—and Charles Kean was the first of the real modern actor-managers—the first who could say, "Le théâtre, c'est moi!"

Mr. Pinero. An actor of not very commanding talent, by all I can make out.

W. A. Far inferior both to Macready and to Irving. But he was a clever man, and saw from the first that his policy was to be a star, and nothing but a star. He was his father's son, and that gave him a hold upon the public. He carefully avoided entering into any combination, or subordinating himself to any one. He stuck resolutely to the centre of the stage; and the man who can do that long enough will always find plenty of people—aye, and of critics, too—simple-minded enough to acclaim him as a great actor.

- Mr. Pinero. Come, come!—he must have a certain amount of talent to begin with.
- W. A. So Kean had—he seems to have been excellent in some melodramatic parts. But he had a poor physique, and a high, thin voice, which disabled him for almost all Shakespearean parts except Hamlet, in which no tolerable actor ever fails entirely. For the rest, he pulled through by taking pains to escamoter all the difficulties.
- Mr. Pinero. To "dodge" is the technical term in English.
- W. A. That's it—he pulled through by dodging and dressing; and he bequeathed the art to his successors, who happened to be, like himself, men of inadequate physique and voice. They improved upon his methods in every respect—dressed more magnificently and dodged more assiduously—until Shakespearean acting became what it has been, with rare exceptions, for many a day: a gorgeously-decorated weariness of the flesh.

Mr. Pinero. Hold hard! You go much too far. Can you deny what I said just now of Sir Henry Irving?

W. A. I accept every word of it. I admire as much as you do his character and his talent. But I cannot admire the torturing slowness of his delivery of Shakespeare's verse in a series of staccato snippets; and I believe that has had as much to do as any external accident with the temporary set-back from which he has happily recovered.

Mr. Pinero. I don't agree with you at all. I believe that Irving's noble and intellectual renderings of such parts as Macbeth, Iago, and Wolsey have been, and rightly, far more attractive to the public than the windy

declamations of the old school of brainless actors, reeling off their rote-learnt lines by the fathom.

W. A. I call that unblushing sophistry. Is it fair to oppose the bad actors of the old school to the best actor of the new? I am not urging, in a Repertory Theatre or elsewhere, a revival, pure and simple, of the old school of rhetorical acting. You and I saw enough of it to know how bad it could be when it tried. Do you remember Charles Dillon? Do you remember Barry Sullivan?

Mr. Pinero. Barry had his moments, I fancy; Dillon certainly had. But in the main you are right. The "sterling" actor of the Macready school was a terror.

- W. A. Heaven forbid he should come to life again! What we want is an amalgamation of the old "chest" actor with the new "head" actor. For my part, I would give all the brains in the Garrick Club for a man with a voice, and with the skill to use it. Ah! if Forbes Robertson had only a little more imagination and fire! There's a man that can speak. How charming his Hamlet was!
- Mr. Pinero. Charming !—delightful! Yes, I admit that the methods of T. W. Robertson have been to some extent applied—and misapplied—to poetic drama. I admit that a great actor of the type you have suggested might do much to educate his fellow-actors, and the public—and the critics. He might create a totally new tradition. But do you think your Repertory Theatre would be likely to produce him?
- W. A. It would at least give him a chance of developing, sanely and many-sidedly. It would give

him variety of experience. It would make his talent supple and adaptable. It would teach him (and this, believe me, is most essential) to subordinate his individuality-not, mark you, to one other actor who happens to hold the purse-strings—but to an artistic whole. It would not subject him either to the irritation of playing second, third, or fourth fiddle for months on end, or to the temptation of capturing the centre of the stage and "abounding in his own sense." There is nothing more fatal to an actor, artistically speaking than the untrammelled power to do nothing but what he "fancies himself" in. To be for ever following the line of least resistance, and posing in parts cut to your measure, is the sure way to mannerism and degeneration of talent. Look at the German company now playing at the Comedy Theatre. They are not great actors-far from it-but, being trained in repertory theatres, they have a suppleness and variety of skill that is nowhere to be found on the English stage,

Mr. Pinero. Oh, I know when you get to Germany there's no holding you. Haven't you been dinning it into us of late that the Germans, besides being the only people who can build theatres, are the only people who can write plays? You have discovered—so I gather—that frocks and flunkeys are the bane of the English drama, and would have us imitate the airy grace of Sudermann, the poetic squalor of Hauptmann.

W. A. My dear Pinero, I wouldn't have you imitate any one or anything, except Life. All I say is that you—not you personally, of course, but you English dramatists as a body—have of late years concentrated your attention rather too exclusively on one corner of

life: the Hyde Park Corner, so to speak. Don't you admit the soft impeachment?

Mr. Pinero. Speaking for myself—not entirely. Not to go back to *The Squire* and *Sweet Lavender* and my Court Theatre farces, what do you say to *Trelawny of the "Wells"*? Surely there wasn't much Mayfair in that?

W. A. A brilliant exception, certainly. But then that was almost a historical comedy—and, if you'll let me say so, one of the most truly poetic things you have ever done.

Mr. Pinero. Well, then, how about *The Benefit of the Doubt?* The people depicted there were surely as suburban as even your heart can desire.

W. A. Suburban, perhaps; but they all lived at the rate of five thousand a year. You did not take us out of the eternal drawing-room. And if there was no duke in the play, there were a knight and a bishop.

Mr. Pinero. Well, would you have me play chess with nothing but pawns?

W. A. No, but I think you overwork your castles.

Mr. Pinero. Then what do you say to The Gay Lord Quex? Wasn't that a study of cockney character?

W. A. Yes, with a plentiful garnish of coronets, and with "Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or," to wash it down.

Mr. Pinero. Seriously, there may be something in what you say. But I think you would find, if you tried to write drama, not only that wealth and leisure are more productive of dramatic complications than poverty and hard work, but that if you want to get a certain order of ideas expressed or questions discussed, you must go pretty well up in the social scale. I assure you I

have often tried to keep my characters down, as it were, and found I could not. I would feel, "No, no, this won't do in this environment." My characters would force me, in spite of myself, to lift them up in the world. You must take into account the inarticulateness, the inexpressiveness, of the English lower-middle and lower classes—their reluctance to analyse, to generalise, to give vivid utterance either to their thoughts or their emotions.

W. A. I grant a difficulty; but difficulties are created by an all-wise Providence for the greater glory of the artist in overcoming them. Look at——

Mr. Pinero. I know! Look at Germany.

W. A. Yes, Germany. The Germans may not be the most artistic people in the world, but they are the most competent, practical people at present in Europe; and it is the practical as well as the artistic point of view that I am urging on you. Do you realise that the leading German playwrights, Hauptmann and Sudermann, are enormously popular—that though their plays do not have such long unbroken runs as yours and Jones's, there is never a night, year out, year in, when several of them are not being played before great audiences in those palatial theatres that I bored you with in my lecture? They must be very wealthytheir fees must roll in at a rate that even an Anglo-Saxon dramatist need not despise. And how do they win this success? Not by keeping their eyes fixed on one parish of one city, but by mirroring life in its most varied aspects. Hauptmann, in whom the note of evangelical pity is very pronounced, has even a partiality for low life-though not, in his mature work at any rate, for anything that can fairly be called squalor. But Sudermann runs the whole gamut of society, from the Herr Baron and Frau Gräfin down to the seamstress and the tramp. Don't you think that a similar catholicity of outlook might be to the advantage of the English drama? to its material as well as its spiritual advantage?

Mr. Pinero. You overlook one element in the problem—or rather two. You forget that the German lower classes are probably a good deal more voluble and expressive than ours; but, chiefly, you forget that German audiences don't mind being bored, and ours do. Our people demand a certain sparkle and brightness in their plays that the Germans entirely dispense with

W. A. You mean that we want "smart" society, in two senses?

Mr. Pinero. Yes,—is not that so?

W. A. Only, I believe, because no one has as yet had the art to present other strata of society (except in melodrama) strongly, interestingly, convincingly.

Mr. Pinero. Perhaps, perhaps. But I don't think you realise the difficulty of dealing on the English stage with any special environment, other than what is vaguely known as society. A serious political play is impossible; we take our politics so tragically in real life that we can only make a farce of them in the theatre. A military play you might have, or a sporting play—but these, after all, would only be a particular brand of the society play. As for commerce—

W. A. Ah! there now! What could be more interesting than a serious study of the City man!

And who could do it better than yourself? You could show him watching the tape and manipulating the market in Basinghall Street. You could track him into his suburban wilds—into his glass-houses at Sydenham or the pavilion of his golf club at Surbiton. And his womankind—legitimate or illegitimate—surely they are worth study. I don't see that you could have a more fruitful environment, for comedy, tragedy, and satire combined, than, say, the "Kaffir Circus." Why should the dramatists leave it entirely to the melodramatists?

Mr. Pinero. Well, it may comfort you to know that in my next play—not the one I am now writing, but the one after—I think of going, not into the Kaffir Circus, but into the provinces.

W. A. Bravo! I'm sure you'll find a good deal of human nature even in Little Peddlington. Carlyle used to harangue about an "Exodus from Houndsditch." My prescription for you, and still more for your esteemed colleagues, is an Exodus from Bond Street. I think I shall start an "English Dramatists' Fresh Air Fund." And now methinks I scent the morning fog, and Cibber's snores plead trumpet-tongued for your release. Good-night—

Mr. Pinero. Stop a moment—I have something more to say about this tendency of modern drama to gravitate towards hig lif. I fancy the real reason lies deeper than you seem to suppose. Is it not the fact that, from the Greeks onwards, the dramatist has always drawn his inspiration, or at any rate borrowed his method of expression, from the lives of people of exalted rank? Nothing of considerable merit, but low

comedy, has ever come from the study of low life. Shakespeare, even in comedy, deals far more largely in dukes and duchesses than any dramatist of to-day. The Merry Wives of Windsor, if I remember rightly, is the only exception to this rule, and certainly not his happiest inspiration. As for tragedy, there is nothing that can be properly so esteemed in low life; because there is no height from which a common person can fall, consequently no irony of circumstances, no refinement of suffering. What have you to say to that?

W. A. I say that the laws of hospitality forbid a man to bludgeon an unoffending guest with Aristotle in the small hours of the morning. I add that "my head is bloody, but unbowed." It is true that Aristotle considered a fall from prosperity to adversity the best-not the only-form of tragedy, and that in Greek drama this fall is often accompanied by, if it does not consist in, a fall in material position and status. But the whole tendency of modern feeling is surelyis it not?-to dissociate inward from outward prosperity, the well-being of the soul from the well-being of the bank-account. The fall from happiness to misery is the essence of tragedy as we now conceive it; and that fall may not, generally does not, involve any change in outward circumstances or material Therefore I suggest that the peasant's prosperity. tragedy may be just as affecting as the peer's, and that Jude the Obscure moves us, in his obscurity, a good deal more than all the kings and princesses of Ruritania, in all their insignia of state.

Mr. Pinero. Fiction is one thing, the stage another. It was all very well for Turgueneff, in fiction, to call

a Russian peasant *The King Lear of the Steppes*. But the King Lear of the stage is Shakespeare's—the King of Britain—the man who stands on such a pinnacle that his fall from it excites pity and terror. For all our democratic theories, is it not true, as a matter of fact, that we are not greatly stirred by the sorrows of those in humble condition?

W. A. Go and see Duse in Cavalleria Rusticana, and then answer your own question.

Mr. Pinero. Who is the sophist now? You rebut the statement of a general tendency by instancing one performance of a woman of transcendent genius.

W. A. That reminds me. When you called me back just now, I thought you were going to tell me that the difficulty in the way of our leaving the beaten track of the society play lay in the fact that the majority of our actors are society actors—excellent in a drawing-room, fish out of water in any other social environment. Roughly speaking, is not that true?

Mr. Pinero. No; I should say not. On the contrary, as regards the minor characters of a play at any rate, it is easier to get a low-life part well played than a high-life part.

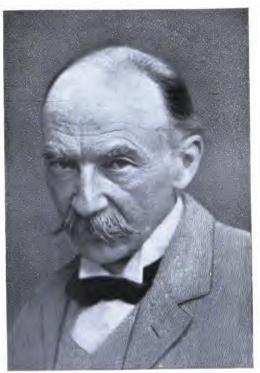
W. A. I confess I'm surprised to hear you say so. I should have thought that, outside the circle of a few conventional types—the usual chambermaids and valets, the comic Jew, the bailiff's man, the pugilist, and so forth—it was almost impossible to get a low-life part played with any originality or fidelity of observation on the English stage. Now go to—

Mr. Pinero. Stop! I know what's coming—"Go to the German theatre, and see how every one on the stage is an accomplished character-actor!" That would be excellent and most helpful advice if I could write Silesian, or Swabian, or Platt-Deutsch; but candour compels me to admit that I cannot. I have to write in English for English actors. At the same time I assure you that if I do not emulate your friend Hauptmann, and write the Washerwoman's Comedy and the Cabman's Tragedy, it is not because I despair of getting these masterpieces adequately interpreted.

W. A. Well, in saying all this you rather unkindly take the wind out of the sails of one of my pet arguments. And I believe you say more in your haste than you would stand to at your leisure. I cannot think that the average English actor has anything like the suppleness, the adaptability, the power of observation, of the average German actor. And therefore, pending the establishment of a Repertory Theatre-or rather repertory theatres all over the country-I really think you dramatists ought to combine, in your own interests, to countenance, and if necessary endow, some such institution as Mr. Franklin Sargent's excellent "Academy of Dramatic Art" in New York. Sargent's enterprise is liberally supported by Charles and Daniel Frohman-managers who know their business if ever man did. It's too late now to tell you of all the interesting things I saw in Mr. Sargent's Academy; but this I may say, that character-acting, even low character-acting, is specially studied and practised. For instance, I have seen a whole class of young men and women stand up, each in succession, and reproduce, either in pantomime or with words, little street episodes observed by themselves-an Irish policeman "movingon" an Italian image-seller, a woman watching a runaway horse and cart, and so forth.

Mr. Pinero. That strikes me as excellent training. I certainly think there is room for something of the kind here; and I would most cordially support it—as I would your Repertory Theatre, if any support I could give would be of the smallest value. Goodnight.

January, 1901.



MR. THOMAS HARDY.

To face p. 29.

Conversation II. With Mr. Thomas Hardy.

Scene: Mr. Hardy's library at Max Gate, near Casterbridge. Discovered, before a smouldering fire of elm-logs, Thomas Hardy and W. A.

Mr. Hardy. Have you seen anything of C——lately?

W. A. I've scarcely seen him since our famous midnight expedition to Egdon Heath.

Mr. Hardy. Ah, yes, when he wrenched his ankle. How many years ago is that?

W. A. It must be five or six.

Mr. Hardy. And you haven't been here since then, have you?

W. A. I had a little walking tour in Wessex a couple of years ago, but you weren't at home. I climbed up to Shaston, in the tracks of Jude and Sue: went on to Sherton Abbas, and met Grace Melbury and Winterbourne in Sheep Street: then down through the country of the Woodlanders to Casterbridge: on to Budmouth, looking for (but not finding) Overcombe of The Trumpet-Major on the way—

Mr. Hardy. You would have had to turn eastward from the main road.

W. A. From Budmouth along the Chesil, and up the escarpments of the Isle of Slingers, till we reached the place where Anne Garland watched the *Victory* fading under the sea-line on her way to Plymouth and Trafalgar.

Mr. Hardy. She did, you know—that was a true story.

W. A. I've often wondered what proportion, so to speak, of fact there is in your books?

Mr. Hardy. In several of my stories there is a very large element of fact, or tradition. For instance, the story of Napoleon's landing in person on the Dorsetshire coast—I don't know whether you remember it—is related as a fact.

W. A. Do you yourself believe it?

Mr. Hardy. I cannot honestly say I do. But the incident in *The Trumpet-Major* of the people letting their cider run when Buonaparte was reported to have landed is a literal fact. Few of my longer books, however, are so closely founded on fact as *The Trumpet-Major*. On a single series of facts, that is to say. In other books, one situation will often be an amalgam of many real incidents. In that way, it seems to me, one may hope to get at what is fundamental in them—to present the typical incident. Just as, in character-drawing, several similar individuals will blend into one type.

W. A. A sort of composite photograph, in fact? I wonder if you are properly grateful to the deities—the tribal gods of the West Saxons, I suppose—who have given you such stores of knowledge to draw upon, and have made you the historiographer of their ancient and delectable domain?

Mr. Hardy. I suppose it is an advantage, from one point of view, to be thoroughly at home in one region, however narrow. But think of the men who have been thoroughly at home in all!

- W. A. I believe if I were an artist, and had my choice as to the form of equipment I would prefer, I should choose intensive rather than extensive knowledge.
- Mr. Hardy. It has been said that a man ought to know something about everything, and everything about something.
- W. A. Well, it seems to me that if ever man fulfilled the latter condition, you are that enviable mortal. What you don't know about this Wessex of vours isn't knowledge. You are as familiar with the Wessex stars as with the Wessex flowers. never forget the first page of yours I ever came across -when I picked up an odd number of the Cornhill, five-and-twenty years ago, and read the passage in Far from the Madding Crowd where you describe Gabriel Oak standing at midnight on the brow of a hill, and actually seeing the revolution of the earth as the constellations wheel under the horizon. It seems to me there isn't a contour of the country, from Exonbury to Christminster, that isn't mapped in your mind. You appear to know every copse and common, every elbow of every lane, every "churchhay," every water-mead, every "eweleaze." You have history, local tradition, folk-lore, village gossip, all at your fingers'ends Von-
- Mr. Hardy (laughing). Oh, one can't be such an encyclopædia as all that! Perhaps some of what you take for my knowledge may be "only my artfulness." But it's true that my feeling for this county is that of the countryman born and bred. Have you ever noticed the different relation to nature of the town child and the

country child? The town-bred boy will often appreciate nature more than the country boy, but he does not know it in the same sense. He will rush to pick a flower which the country boy does not seem to notice. But it is part of the country boy's life. It grows in his soul—he does not want it in his buttonhole. I happened to live, too, in close contact with the people——

W. A. Haven't I heard you say that you used to write love-letters for the village girls?

Mr. Hardy (reluctantly). Well—yes, to their soldier sweethearts in India—the East Indies, as it was called then

W. A. That was part of Samuel Richardson's apprenticeship, too. He trained for Clarissa, you for Tess.

- Mr. Hardy. But I think you will find that Richardson's case was different. He was employed to compose the letters; I was only the amanuensis. Indeed, I was chosen on account of my tender years—because I could write, and read the replies, yet couldn't understand. They looked upon me as a mere writing machine, or a sort of phonograph to be talked into. And as a matter of fact I understood very little, and took very little interest in what I wrote and read; though I remember to this day one lover's address, as given in his letter: "Calcutta, or Elsewear."
- W. A. I fancy many of those letters remained written in your mind in sympathetic ink, only waiting for the heat of creation to bring them out.

Mr. Hardy. Possibly, in a sub-conscious way. The human mind is a sort of palimpsest, I suppose; and it's hard to say what records may not lurk in it.

W. A. Well, I can see that your country life goes

far to account for your insight into rustic character. But how did you get your surface knowledge—your topographical mastery—of so large a region?

Mr. Hardy. I don't know that my surface knowledge of the country is so intimate as you think. But, for one thing, when I was quite a young man, an architect's pupil, I used to be sent round to sketch village churches as a preliminary to their restoration—which mostly meant destruction. I feel very remorseful now; but, after all, it wasn't my fault—I was only obeying orders.

W. A. Ah, I had forgotten that you looked at the country not only with the novelist's but with the draughtsman's eye. That accounts for much. And these sketch-book wanderings must have brought you into many quaint nooks and corners. I suppose, now, you can yourself remember many of the old customs—the relics of paganism—that you have described?

Mr. Hardy. Oh, yes. They survived well into my time. I have seen with my own eyes things that many people believe to have been extinct for centuries. For instance, the maypole was familiar to me in my child-hood—the flower-wreathed pole, with what they called the garland at the top (that is to say, two intersecting hoops of flowers), round which the people danced. More than that, I have seen men in the stocks.

W. A. Is it possible?

Mr. Hardy. I remember one perfectly—when I was very young. It was in the village I have called Weatherbury. I can see him now, sitting in the scorching sunshine, with the flies crawling over him, and not another human being near except me. I can see his

blue worsted stockings projecting through the legholes, and the shining nails in his boots. He was quite a hero in my eyes. I sidled up to him and said goodday to him, and felt mightily honoured when he nodded to me.

- W. A. Do you know what his offence was?
- Mr. Hardy. "Drunk and disorderly," no doubt.
- W. A. Then by what authority—by what legal process—was he put in the stocks?
- Mr. Hardy. I can't say exactly. It used to be understood that the constable could put a man in the stocks, but that only a magistrate could lock them. But perhaps that was only a village superstition. Then, again, the Christmas Mummers flourished well into my recollection—indeed, they have not so long died out.
- W.A. I can remember a sort of mummers in Scotland whom we called "guisers"; but they were simply boys wearing masks and begging for halfpence.
- Mr. Hardy. Oh, our mummers hereabouts gave a regular performance—The Play of St. George it was called. It contained quite a number of traditional characters: the Valiant Soldier, the Turkish Knight, St. George himself, the Saracen, Father Christmas, the Fair Sabra, and so on. Rude as it was, the thing used to impress me very much—I can clearly recall the odd sort of thrill it would give. The performers used to carry a long staff in one hand and a wooden sword in the other, and pace monotonously round, intoning their parts on one note, and punctuating them by nicking the sword against the staff—something like this:—

"Here come I, the Valiant Soldier (nick), Slasher is my name (nick)."

W. A. The pacing and rhythmic sing-song suggest kinship with the Chinese acting I have seen in San Francisco and New York. And what was the action of the play?

Mr. Hardy. I really don't know, except that it ended in a series of mortal combats in which all the characters but St. George were killed. And then the curious thing was that they were invariably brought to life again. A personage was introduced for the purpose—the Doctor of Physic, wearing a cloak and a broad-brimmed beaver.

. W. A. How many actors would there be in a company?

Mr. Hardy. Twelve to fifteen, I should think. Sometimes a large village would furnish forth two sets of mummers. They would go to the farmhouses round, between Christmas and Twelfth Night, doing some four or five performances each evening, and getting ale and money at every house. Sometimes the mummers of one village would encroach on the traditional "sphere of influence" of another village, and then there would be a battle in good earnest.

W. A. Did women take part in the performances?

Mr. Hardy. I think not—the fair Sabra was always played by a boy. But the character was often omitted.

W. A. And when did the mumming go out?

Mr. Hardy. It went on in some neighbourhoods till 1880, or thereabouts. I have heard of a parson here and there trying to revive it; but of course

that isn't at all the same thing—the spontaneity is gone.

- W. A. Now tell me, as to rural superstitions belief in witchcraft, and so forth—are they dying out?
- Mr. Hardy. On the surface, yes; in reality, no. People smile and say, "Of course we don't believe in these things"—but their scepticism is only skin deep. You will find women to this day who will make an image of some enemy and either melt it before the fire or stick pins into it. The belief in the evil eye subsists in full force; also such ideas as that which I have introduced into one of my stories—that if you can draw blood from a witch, you render her powerless.
- W. A. Well, who knows? Perhaps the superstition of Wessex is one day going to have the laugh of the scepticism of Middlesex. It looks as though the whirligig of time were cogitating—if a whirligig can cogitate—some such revenge.

Mr. Hardy. You don't really think so?

W. A. I find it very hard, in these latter days, to draw a line and say, "Beyond this the potentialities of Nature do not go." If I disbelieve in the supernatural, it is only because I am willing to give indefinite extension to the boundaries of the natural. Not "willing"—that is the wrong word—I am most unwilling to believe that there are more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in the philosophy of the placid eighteen-fifties. I heartily wish there were no intangible, imponderable, incalculable forces in the world. If I had made the universe, I should have omitted them. But unfortunately I did not make the

universe—nor did John Stuart Mill or Mr. Herbert Spencer. And it seems to me that science itself, now-a-days, is rapidly driving the words "credulity" and "incredible" out of the language.

Mr. Hardy. Well, now, in this matter my position is just the reverse of yours. I am most anxious to believe in what, roughly speaking, we may call the supernatural—but I find no evidence for it! People accuse me of scepticism, materialism, and so forth; but, if the accusation is just at all, it is quite against my will. For instance, I seriously assure you that I would give ten years of my life—well, perhaps that offer is rather beyond my means—but when I was a younger man, I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost—an authentic, indubitable spectre.

W. A. And you have never seen one?

Mr. Hardy. Never the ghost of a ghost. Yet I should think I am cut out by nature for a ghost-seer. My nerves vibrate very readily; people say I am almost morbidly imaginative; my will to believe is perfect. If ever ghost wanted to manifest himself, I am the very man he should apply to. But no—the spirits don't seem to see it!

W. A. Yet you live in a graveyard, too, don't you?

Mr. Hardy. A Roman graveyard—yes. We decapitated a row of five Roman soldiers or colonists in moving the earth to make the drive there.

W. A. And wasn't there a lady as well?

Mr. Hardy. Yes. I think I showed you the little bronze-gilt fibula that had fastened the fillet across

her brow. I took it from her skull with my own hands, and it lies in the corner cupboard yonder.

- W. A. Yet she hasn't haunted you? Well, that certainly establishes a very strong presumption against the spooks. I can only suggest that they don't think it worth while to appear to you, knowing that, if you recorded their visits, people would think you were romancing. "What the novelist says is not evidence."
- Mr. Hardy. My mother believed that she once saw an apparition. A relative of hers, who had a young child, was ill, and told my mother, who visited her, that she thought she was dying. My mother laughed at the idea; and as a matter of fact she apparently recovered, and my mother went away to her home at some distance. Then one night—lying broad awake, as she declared—my mother saw this lady enter her room and hold out the child to her imploringly. It afterwards appeared (I need scarcely tell you) that she died at that very time; but the odd thing was that, while she was sinking, she continually expressed a wish that my mother should take charge of the child, though she had said nothing about it on my mother's visit.
- W. A. That seems to me a simple case of a very natural dream happening to coincide with a far from improbable event. But indeed I find it much easier to conceive the possibility of apparitions of the living—and the dying are of course living up to the last pulse-beat—than to conceive an apparition of the dead which should be other than a mere hallucination.
- Mr. Hardy. Why should the one be more credible than the other?

- W. A. Simply because there seems to be ample evidence for the existence of forms of cerebral energy not as yet measured and catalogued; whereas in death, so far as we can see, cerebral energy ceases altogether. It may be hard to believe that even an active brain, fifty miles away, can instantaneously impress an idea or an image upon mine as I sit here; but if the brain has, to all appearance, ceased to act—nay, has mouldered into dust—the difficulty becomes infinitely greater. It is conceivable that, through some hitherto unrecognised property of matter, you, in Casterbridge, might be able to hear my watch ticking in London; but when my watch stops—when the mainspring is run down—you won't hear it ticking even if you hold it close to your ear.
 - Mr. Hardy. The spiritualist would maintain that the human watch, at the moment of its stoppage here below, is wound up afresh on another plane of being. But that, as I say, is precisely what, with the best will in the world, I can find no evidence for.
 - W. A. On the other hand, don't you think there is very fair evidence for the possibility of thought-transference, whether in the shape of words or of images?
 - Mr. Hardy. No. In all the researches of the Psychical Society, I find nothing that carries conviction. I cannot get past the famous principle of Hume—wait a minute—I will get the book. . . . Here it is, in the essay Of Miracles: the principle "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its false-hood would be more miraculous than the fact which

it endeavours to establish." Like Hume, I am compelled to "weigh one miracle against the other, and reject the greater."

W. A. Don't you think that the word "miracle" rather confuses the issue? You admit the reality of Röntgen-ray images?

Mr. Hardy. Yes.

W. A. Well, do not they prove certain forms of matter to be permeable to certain—what shall I call them?—vibrations?—in a way that, twenty years ago, would have been regarded as simply miraculous? You admit the genuineness of wireless telegraphy?

Mr. Hardy. Yes.

W. A. Well, is it inconceivable that the human brain may prove to be a more powerful transmitter and a more sensitive receiver than any invented by Marconi or Tesla, operating through some medium as much subtler than electricity as electricity is subtler than atmospheric air?

Mr. Hardy. Oh, I quite admit that all this is conceivable—that there is nothing in it which contradicts the very laws of thought, like the conception of a triangle in which any two sides should be less than the third side. I merely repeat my demand for evidence! Have you known, in your own experience, an instance of thought-transference?

W. A. Divil a wan, as Mr. Dooley would say.

Mr. Hardy. Well now, to be candid, I myself would not say that quite so emphatically. For example, the thoughts of a relation of mine used to "jump with" mine in a way not easily to be explained by mere coincidence. It would often happen when walking

together that, after a long silence, both of us, in the same breath, would speak of some person or thing apparently quite absent from the thoughts of either five minutes before.

- W. A. Don't you think it probable that some external object or incident, too trivial to be consciously noted, may have started in each of you the same train of association?
- Mr. Hardy. That might be so in some cases; but the thing used to occur (or so I thought) too frequently to be always accounted for in that way. However, I admit—or rather this is my very point—that the instance is too trifling, and too uncertain, to have the smallest evidential value; yet no nearer approach to thought-transference has ever come within my ken.
- W. A. Well now, let me give you one or two instances of things that I am inclined, till further notice, to put down to thought-transference, or telepathy, or whatever you like to call it.

Mr. Hardy. Hearsay instances?

W. A. Yes, but coming from people I know well and trust implicitly.

Mr. Hardy. H'm!

W. A. In the first case I think I may, without indiscretion, name my authority. It was Mark Twain.

Mr. Hardy. "What the humourist said-"

W. A. "——is not evidence," you think? I can only assure you that in this case Mr. Clemens was absolutely serious; and indeed if he had invented the story it would have been a much better one. Mr. Clemens and Mr. Cable were giving readings from their own works, and, among other places, visited

Montreal. Here, one afternoon, a reception was given in their honour at one of the big hotels. According to the American fashion, they stood at one end of a suite of rooms, and people filed up the rooms in a long stream, shook hands with the guests of honour, and passed down the rooms again. Mark Twain happened at one moment to look towards the entrance door, and saw, coming in, a lady whom he had known in Nevada twenty-five years before, but whom he had never seen, and seldom thought of, in the interval. He saw her gradually advancing with the stream of people, sometimes hidden for a moment, sometimes emerging again. She did not come up to him or shake hands, but in the bustle of the reception he scarcely noticed this. The same evening he called at the house of some friends. "We're so glad you have come," they said; "there's some one in the next room that's very anxious to see you." "I know," said Mr. Clemens: "it's Mrs. So-and-so." At that moment the lady herself came in, and Mark Twain's first words to her were, "I saw you at the reception this afternoon." "But I wasn't there," she replied. "Oh ves," he said: "I watched you for some time-and you were wearing the very dress you have on now." "I assure you I haven't been an hour in Montreal," she answered. And he found that beyond all doubt she had only just come in by train from a distant town, and must have been many miles from Montreal when he thought he saw her in the reception-room.

Mr. Hardy. A chance resemblance and a coincidence, I should say—nothing more.

W. A. Well, my second case, I own, may be ac-

counted for in the same way. A friend of mine was arriving at the London Docks from Australia. He half expected that an aunt of his would come to meet him; and, scanning the crowd of people on the wharf, he saw, not his aunt, but a girl whom he knew to be a close friend of hers. He lost sight of the girl in the crowd, and did not see her again. He drove straight to his aunt's house, and said, "I saw Miss Blank on the wharf to-day: I wonder whom she was meeting?" He noticed that his aunt was surprised and rather perturbed by this, and found on inquiry that Miss Blank had been staying with her parents at a Welsh watering-place, but had unaccountably disappeared some days before, and had not been heard of since. A few days afterwards, they learned that her body had been found in the sea, close to the place where her parents were staying.

Mr. Hardy. That may of course be a case of resemblance and coincidence; or it may be that your friend saw the living girl—that she came to meet some one who did not arrive—and that she then returned to Wales, and found her way into the sea. In short, there are half-a-dozen hypotheses less miraculous than the supposition either that her ghost was there objectively, so to speak, or that her image was impressed upon your friend's visual nerves by some mysterious emanation from her still living brain.

W. A. Well, listen to my third case; it is of a rather different kind. This was told me by an eminent professor in a leading American university—an absolute sceptic on all "occult" subjects. He was asked to go and test a celebrated medium—well known

to the Psychical Society, by the way. Now, he had had a mortal enemy who had been dead some yearsa man of great mental power, but of coarse, overbearing, intolerable character. On one occasion, some particularly notable word had been used between them, under such circumstances that neither of them could possibly forget it "while memory held its seat." The Professor asked the medium-who was, of course, in a tranceto tell him this word. She did not tell him the word, but she burst forth into a torrent of abusive rage, exactly reproducing the character of the dead man. The Professor assured me that if her outpouring had been taken down in shorthand, and shown to any one who had known the dear departed, he would have said, without a moment's hesitation, "That is So-and-So speaking." Curious, isn't it?

Mr. Hardy. Did the medium know the Professor?

W. A. He said he was sure she didn't, and that it was absolutely impossible that she could ever have known the dead man.

Mr. Hardy. Then what is your theory? That the Professor, in putting the question, conjured up and unconsciously dramatised the dead man, and that the medium, in some occult way, overheard, so to speak, the Professor's silent dramatisation?

W. A. If we take the facts for granted, does not something like that seem the least miraculous explanation?

Mr. Hardy. I confess that, if belief were a matter of choice, I should prefer to accept the spiritual hypothesis.

W. A. And believe that the abusive gentleman's

ghost went blaspheming, to all eternity, up and down the Fourth Dimension?

Mr. Hardy. Even so. I quite admit the pitiful ineffectualness, even grotesqueness, of all the alleged manifestations of the spirit world, and the eeriness of spirits, to our seeming——

W. A. (interrupting). They add a new terror to death.

Mr. Hardy (continuing). But for my part I say in all sincerity, "Better be inconvenienced by visitants from beyond the grave than see none at all." The material world is so uninteresting, human life is so miserably bounded, circumscribed, cabin'd, cribb'd, confined. I want another domain for the imagination to expatiate in.

W. A. But the imagination can, and does, expatiate as much as it pleases; else where would the ghost-stories come from?

Mr. Hardy. Ah, yes; but the fact that I can't believe them to be true destroys them for me. A ghost-story that should convince me would make me a happier man. And if you come to that, I don't know that the grotesqueness, the incompleteness of the manifestations is at all conclusive against their genuineness. Is not this incompleteness a characteristic of all phenomena, of the universe at large? It often seems to me like a half-expressed, an ill-expressed idea. Do you know Hartmann's philosophy of the Unconscious? It suggested to me what seems almost like a workable theory of the great problem of the origin of evil—though this, of course, is not Hartmann's own theory—namely, that there may be a consciousness, infinitely far off, at the

other end of the chain of phenomena, always striving to express itself, and always baffled and blundering, just as the spirits seem to be.

W. A. Is not that simply the good old Manichæan heresy, with Matter playing the part of the evil principle—Satan, Ahriman, whatever you choose to call it?

Mr. Hardy. John Stuart Mill somewhere expresses surprise that Manichæanism was not more widely accepted. But is not all popular religion in essence Manichæan? Does not it always postulate a struggle between a principle of good and an independent, if not equally powerful, principle of evil?

W. A. And the pessimist holds, I take it, that the

principle of evil is the stronger.

Mr. Hardy. No. I should not put it precisely in that way. For instance, people call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that "not to have been born is best," then I do not reject the designation. I never could understand why the word "pessimism" should be such a red rag to many worthy people; and I believe, indeed, that a good deal of the robustious, swaggering optimism of recent literature is at bottom cowardly and insincere. I do not see that we are likely to improve the world by asseverating, however loudly, that black is white, or at least that black is but a necessary contrast and foil, without which white would be white no longer. That is mere juggling with a metaphor. But my pessimism, if pessimism it be, does not involve the assumption that the world is going to the dogs, and that Ahriman is winning all along the line. On the contrary, my practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist. What are my books but

one plea against "man's inhumanity to man"—to woman—and to the lower animals? (By the way, my opposition to "sport" is a point on which I am rather in conflict with my neighbours hereabouts.) Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good.

W. A. And you think that we are getting rid of the remediable ills?

Mr. Hardy. Slowly-yes-very slowly.

W. A. War, for instance?

Mr. Hardy. Oh yes, war is doomed. It is doomed by the gradual growth of the introspective faculty in mankind—of their power of putting themselves in another's place, and taking a point of view that is not their own. In another aspect, this may be called the growth of a sense of humour. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, but in the fulness of time, war will come to an end, not for moral reasons, but because of its absurdity.

W. A. It seems to me that the Press, with its thirst for alarmist news, and its gigantic exaggeration and reverberation of every international jealousy, suspicion, and rancour, is one of the great agents for keeping war alive.

Mr. Hardy. I noticed that several people who answered that American editor's query as to the chief danger of the twentieth century, named the Press as the influence most to be feared—and I'm not sure that I didn't agree with them.

W. A. Yet don't you think that on the intellectual,

as opposed to the newsmongering, side of journalism, there has been a marked advance during the past fifty years? For instance, don't you approve of the way in which signed criticism is gradually crushing the old anonymous review?

Mr. Hardy. I think the rule ought to be that favourable criticisms may be unsigned, but that the critic should be bound to take the responsibility of an unfavourable judgment. There should be no stabbing in the dark. Not that I, personally, have any wish to complain of criticism, signed or unsigned.

- W. A. It seems to me that reviewing, as a whole, is becoming more conscientious, if not more competent.
- Mr. Hardy. I remember a case in which a critic seemed to me to carry conscientiousness to an inconvenient pitch. Writing of my Wessex Poems, this gentleman said that when he first read the book he thought it rather good, but, being determined not to be taken in, and to be conscientious at all hazards, he made a point of getting up to re-read it on a wet morning before breakfast, and then found that it was worth very little. That seemed to me an excessive devotion to critical duty.
- W. A. On that principle, the best criticism in the language ought to have been produced by the dwellers in Grub Street of old, who seldom breakfasted at all.
- Mr. Hardy. Other critics seemed to me to take unnecessary objection to my use of local Wessex words, which they declared to be obsolete. But they are not obsolete here; they are understood and used by educated people. And if they supply a want in the language—if they express an idea which cannot otherwise be so

accurately or so briefly expressed—why may not one attempt to preserve them?

- W. A. It is a beneficent act; but, like so many other beneficent acts, it is apt to be met with ingratitude.
- Mr. Hardy. I have no sympathy with the criticism which would treat English as a dead language—a thing crystallised at an arbitrarily selected stage of its existence, and bidden to forget that it has a past and deny that it has a future. Purism, whether in grammar or vocabulary, almost always means ignorance. Language was made before grammar, not grammar before language. And as for the people who make it their business to insist on the utmost possible impoverishment of our English vocabulary, they seem to me to ignore the lessons of history, science, and common-sense.
- W. A. I have been struck, in reading your books, with the large survival of pure Saxon in the Wessex speech.
- Mr. Hardy. Where else should you go for pure Saxon? It has often seemed to me a pity, from many points of view—and from the point of view of language among the rest—that Winchester did not remain, as it once was, the royal, political, and social capital of England, leaving London to be the commercial capital. The relation between them might have been something like that between Paris and Marseilles or Havre; and perhaps, in that case, neither of them would have been so monstrously overgrown as London is to-day. We should then have had a metropolis free from the fogs of the Thames valley; situated, not on clammy clay, but on chalk hills, the best soil in the world for habita-

tion; and we might have preserved in our literary language a larger proportion of the racy Saxon of the West-country. Don't you think there is something in this?

W. A. I am inclined to answer, with Robert Bruce in John Davidson's play;

"A subtle question, soldier; But profitless, requiring fate unwound."

And now, I fancy, it must be bedtime. That clock of yours seems to have been chiming the quarters at intervals of five minutes for a couple of hours past.

Mr. Hardy. Well, it is close upon the witching time when churchyards, in my experience, omit to yawn. Here are our candles.

W. A. If I should see the ghost of that Roman lady, I will direct her to your room.

Mr. Hardy. Thank you: I shall be pleased to meet her. Good-night!

[Exeunt.

February, 1901.



To face p. 51.

MRS. CRAIGIE (JOHN OLIVER HOBBES).

From a photograph by G. C. Beresford, London.

Conversation III. With Mrs. Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes).

Scene: Mrs. Craigie's Drawing-room. Period: Tea-time.

W. A. I did not see you at the Royalty the other evening.

Mrs. Craigie. No, I have not been well enough to go much to the theatre of late. I should have liked to see *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* again. I saw it three times when it was first produced. It seems to me Mr. Pinero has made a striking and just study of an essentially religious woman without a religion,—the most tragic of all feminine temperaments. Of all masculine temperaments too, for that matter.

W. A. Do you think he has got the veneer of secularism quite right?

Mrs. Craigie. I have heard it said that he has gone wrong in matters of phraseology. Personally, I disagree with that view. I think her language is lifelike. He really understands the woman he wants to draw.

W. A. Should you call Pinero, then, a féministe, in the sense in which you used the word the other day?

Mrs. Craigie. Certainly. He has made some quite remarkable studies of women. But in what other sense would you use the word féministe?

W. A. Oh, no doubt I had a wrong notion of it. I have always taken it to mean, in the widest acceptation, "a woman's-rights man." You use it to denote an artist who makes a special study of women—

Mrs. Craigie. Which a "woman's-rights man"

usually omits to do. He is too much occupied with Woman in the abstract to have much of an eye for women in the concrete. No; I think you will find the word féministe applied to such writers as Bourget, Donnay, Marcel Prévost, Tolstoy, and D'Annunzio. A most distinguished scholar lately described Euripides as a féministe. But it is not such a great feat as people suppose for a man to draw a woman with a certain vraisemblance.

W. A. And for a woman to draw a man?

Mrs. Craigie. I think this whole subject is beset with preconceptions—the commonplaces of facile criticism. Men's women are considered miracles, women's women are scrutinised for traits of "womanishness," and women's men are regarded with smiling compassion. All this proceeds from the quite superficial assumption that the natural thing is for each sex to understand itself best.

W. A. Burns, at any rate, seems to have thought differently, when he said

O wad some power the giftie gie us To see ourselves as ithers see us.

But if men drawn by women were always the truest----

Mrs. Craigie. The truest, probably, in certain relations—as the fathers, husbands, lovers, friends, and brothers of women. I hope you do not forget, too, that men are the sons of women!

W. A. Let us put it, then, that the common prejudice against women's drawing of men is in great measure groundless,—how comes it that we generally find it shared by women? One would expect women, at any

rate, to show ready recognition of the truth of women's men.

Mrs. Craigie. Don't you know, Mr. Archer, that the mass of women take their criticism from men, and would on no account be found guilty of the womanishness of accepting a feminine view of masculine character? And further, the average woman's idea of a man is her own particular man. (I am not speaking of artists, who are, in the nature of things, neither "average" nor "normal" in their estimates of character.) George Sand, among women, was one of the few sound critics of literary work. Flaubert did not care for her novels, but he paid the greatest regard to her criticism. Again, to whom does a man, both voluntarily and involuntarily, reveal his true self, if not to a woman?

W. A. And vice versa, should you say?

Mrs. Craigie. In a measure—but not to the same degree. Women stand more on the defensive than men. They are more sentimental and far less frank; beyond any question, too, they are more complicated psychologically. That is why no hero—unless one can make him a Don Quixote—is ever so interesting, or "thankful," as a heroine. Men, too, distrust each other in the way of confidences, and also in the way of "understanding." The maternal side of a woman's mind is very strong. Men can depend upon it in every emergency.

W. A. Well, I so far agree with you that I think many men—Englishmen, at any rate—are prevented by a sense of false shame from anything like intimate self-revelation to other men, and will give themselves

away much more frankly to a sympathetic woman. We are accused of always playing a part in feminine society; but the man who puts on airs and affectations before a clever woman is anything but a clever man.

Mrs. Craigie. Women have certainly less of the mauvaise honte which, you say, prevents a man from intimately revealing himself to other men. They are more expansive with each other—

W. A. And far more observant of each other.

Mrs. Craigie. You mean that we pick each other to pieces in a way that men don't.

W. A. Oh, how can you put it so? Let us rather say that women have a talent, denied to men, for hitting each other off in neat little verbal vignettes—not always flattering. And the upshot seems to be that, for novel-writing, all the advantages are on the spindle side, inasmuch as women know their own sex quite as well as men can, and the other sex much better.

Mrs. Craigie (smiling). That is the logic of the situation, certainly. But knowledge, alas, does not always mean the art of conveying it, or the genius for adapting it, or—the rarest gift—fearlessness in truth-telling. George Sand—with splendid powers—was never so truthful as Byron. I compare them because they had much in common as human beings.

W. A. But don't you think some of the greatest of great men have achieved their special reputation as féministes by drawing, not real women, but ideal women, with whom all the world fell in love?

Mrs. Craigie. That is true, I should say, of two at

least—Shakespeare and George Meredith. How little individualised are some of Shakespeare's women!

W. A. My dear Mrs. Craigie! What heresy!

Mrs. Craigie. Is it not true that many of Portia's speeches could be transferred to Rosalind without the slightest inappropriateness, and many of Viola's speeches to Imogen?

W. A. But is it not also true that the individuality of the characters lies precisely in those speeches which could *not* be so transferred? And what do you say to Juliet?

Mrs. Craigie. She is the immortal type and sublimation of youthful passion in the abstract, without regard to minute distinctions of sex. The one unique womanly trait in Juliet's character is the wholesome determination to have her marriage legal!

W. A. Desdemona, then?

Mrs. Craigie. Not very clearly distinguishable from Cordelia. Of course, their mere outward circumstances involve a certain difference. And, for the rest, the world has dwelt and brooded on them so intensely as to have given them something of the individuality which the merest speck of dust assumes under the microscope. It has filled-in Shakespeare's outlines with a thousand imaginary traits, more or less legitimately deduced from the text, but not actually present in it. Of course I know that the merit is ultimately Shakespeare's. No one but he could have so potently, so irresistibly stimulated the world's imagination. But if it comes to a question of exact and varied knowledge of subtle or complicated feminine character—such a character, for instance, as Meredith's Aminta—I

find much less evidence of it in Shakespeare than people usually discern.

W. A. It is true I have often wondered where, as a matter of history, he made his studies of gentlewomen. The only educated woman with whom we can definitely bring him into relation is the "Dark Lady" of the Sonnets, whom we know to have been, at any rate, a musician. But, though we may conjecture her influence in many of his utterances, I don't know of any single character which can at all plausibly be thought to reproduce her.

Mrs. Craigie. What about Cleopatra?

W. A. Ah, possibly—I had forgotten her for the moment. And don't you think, Mrs. Craigie, that that one character, if he had drawn no other, would be enough to establish Shakespeare's reputation as a féministe? Was there ever a more living woman?

Mrs. Craigie. Oh, by all means, a living woman! All his women are that. They are characteristically, unmistakably women—feminine in every fibre. And that you may say with equal truth of George Meredith's heroines—all that noble procession of brilliant, intellectual, competent, and yet eminently feminine and fascinating women—

W.A. Too often, as it seems to me, examples of

Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand The downward slope to death,

or, at any rate, to disaster.

Mrs. Craigie. Nothing can be more beautiful, certainly, or more agreeable to our self-esteem. But I confess to a feeling that they are not so much a truthful tribute to feminine character, as a revenge

upon reality. The poet created for himself the characters he would fain have found in life, but did not; and the world no sooner came to know them than, as you say, it fell in love with them.

W. A. Then you think that many men get their reputation as féministes by flattering your sex?

Mrs. Craigie. Not so much by flattering us, as by realising, incarnating, the masculine dream of the ideal woman. It is one thing to draw a hyper-feminine woman, and quite another thing to make her exactly true to nature.

W. A. I am afraid there is no doubt that the Ideal Woman does make frequent appearances in masculine fiction; though—if you will forgive my saying so—I think it ill becomes the creator of Brigit Parflete to be too critical in this respect. Talking of the Ideal Woman, did you see Gilbert Murray's Andromache?

Mrs. Craigie. No; I was very sorry to miss it. Is Andromache the Ideal Woman?

W. A. I don't know that Murray would admit it. He would have us accept her as the real woman of the Heroic Age. But I doubt whether he has a case to go to a jury. And, by the bye, Andromache has a rather profound saying which may go far to account for the high accomplishment of women in character-drawing. Orestes says to her, "How is it that you can read my heart so clearly—that you know what is in it better than I do myself?" And she answers something to this effect: "Slaves,"—she is Pyrrhus's slave, you remember,—"Slaves learn by very slight tokens to read the mind of their masters." If we admit, as I suppose we must, that woman has in the

main, until comparatively recent years, stood in a more or less servile relation to man, may not that fact go far to account for her gift of quick and penetrating psychological observation?

Mrs. Craigie. Very probably. Indeed, I fancy Andromache's remark has somewhere been anticipated by Mr. Herbert Spencer. At the same time, while I think women have some incontestible advantages as writers of fiction, I don't deny that they have their disabilities too. They are of course at a certain disadvantage (perhaps at a greater disadvantage than men in the corresponding case) when they try to draw men in their relations with each other—men in the smokingroom, the mess-room, the common-room. Have you ever noticed with what consummate tact Jane Austen eludes this difficulty? She never presents two men alone together. Her men are always shown in the society of women.

W. A. No, that had not occurred to me. I wonder whether she did so intentionally, or by mere instinct?

Mrs. Craigie. Intentionally, you may be sure. She was an artist, if ever there was one. As for George Eliot, she had very rare opportunities for observing and studying men. In the first place, George Henry Lewes was a man with a very varied knowledge of the world of men—

W. A. His conversation, I have been told, was virile in a very pronounced sense.

Mrs. Craigie. ——and, in the second place, her peculiar position threw her much more into the society of men than of women—men whom she met on terms of equality. And how good her men are!

- W. A. I have always thought so. I suppose on e must give up Daniel Deronda.
- Mrs. Craigie. In that case, you see, she was not drawing from nature, but embodying an idea; and that is almost always fatal. But look at Grandcourt, at Lydgate, at Tom Tulliver, at Godfrey and Dunstan Cass, at Tito Melema.
- W. A. What should you say of George Sand's men?

 Mrs. Craigie. Why, that she drew particularly well with the insight of the affections—that her portraits of Chopin, of Alfred de Musset, of Jules Sandeau, are masterpieces—and, one ought to add, of Mazzini. She is the great painter of the artistic temperament.
- W. A. On the whole, then, it seems to me—to put it pedantically—that you attach more value to the objective element in character-drawing than to the subjective. I mean that you think the novelist should draw from models rather than construct from his inner consciousness?
- Mrs. Craigie. Of course, introspection must be the basis of all knowledge of character—you can interpret other people only in the light of your own experience, real or imaginative. But I do think that one of the pitfalls of a man drawing men, a woman drawing women, is that they are too apt to transfer their own ideals and limitations to their characters. How often you hear a man say, "No man would do this," and a woman, "No woman would do that," when they mean nothing more than, "I would never do this or that." The chances are they are mistaken, even as regards themselves. And, at any rate, it is entirely unphilosophical to lay down hard-and-fast negations for either

half of the human race. Character is infinitely various, and the possibilities of action inexhaustible. When a fictitious personage does or says an incredible thing—of course I am not speaking of fairy tales, but of fiction that bears some relation to fact—it is incredible, not in the abstract, as it were, but because it is wrongly correlated to the individual character. Speaking for myself, I hate and distrust plausibility. No writer is so little plausible as Balzac. His people are as full of surprises as our own most intimate friends!

W. A. What you say of introspection as the basis of the novelist's art reminds me of a thing Robert Louis Stevenson told me. He said that George Meredith once read him some chapters of The Egoist while it was still in manuscript. As the character of the Egoist developed, he (Stevenson) grew more and more uncomfortable, till at last he interrupted the reading, and said, "Now, own up, Meredith—you drew Sir Willoughby from me!" Meredith burst into his Homeric laugh, and said: "No, no, my dear fellow—he is all of us; but I found him"—tapping his own breast—"mainly here!"

Mrs. Craigie. That is very characteristic.

W. A. It impressed me so much at the time, that I believe I have told it almost in Stevenson's own words.

Mrs. Craigie. A saying almost like Meredith's is somewhere recorded of George Eliot. But the anecdote suggests to me an observation that may perhaps be new to you, though it is familiar to me, and I think undeniable.

W. A. Pray let me hear it.

Mrs. Craigie. Has it ever struck you that the Church of Rome, which alone among the Churches of Western Europe enjoins and enforces continual examinations of conscience, is the real creator of modern analytical fiction? The Fathers of the Church are the fathers of psychology. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard, and Abelard—where will you find subtler soul-searching than in their writings?

W. A. Alas, my dear Mrs. Craigie, you are speaking not only to a heretic, but to an ignoramus. theological education has been sadly neglected. have failed to read even Newman. His workmanship. of course. I admired: but he was exclusively concerned with issues that had no reality for me. And that very fact suggests the one-purely hypothetical-criticism that I will venture to make upon your remark. I presume that these great men, St. Augustine and the rest, started from a definite theory as to the history and constitution of the human mind. At any rate, they started from the one great fundamental conception of sin-of a possible beatific righteousness, wilfully and criminally foregone by man. I take it-correct me if I am wrong-that Catholic theology has always been based on the assumption of free will, and that the agreeable ingenuity which reconciles the idea of sin with the doctrine of predestination is in the main a product of Protestantism. Well, now, if it should happen-just imagine this for the sake of argumentthat the assumption of free will, and the view of man as a fallen creature, were inconsistent with the real facts of the case-if it should happen that the history and constitution of the human mind were in fact

totally different—would not this fundamental error go far to vitiate the psychological observations of the Fathers?

Mrs. Craigie. Well, trying, for the sake of argument. to imagine the case as you put it, I still don't see the force of your suggestion. The observation of phenomena is not necessarily vitiated by an erroneous conception of their cause. All sciences have proceeded at first upon false assumptions—astronomy springing from astrology, chemistry from alchemy, and so forth. Even if I believed pyschology to be a science like another, and the soul to be nothing but a portion of the molecular mechanism of the universe, subject to the same laws as any other portion. I should still reverence the Fathers as the founders of the science. They saw and registered what happened in the soul; and if their transcendental theories of causes and consequences were wrong, that does not affect the scientific value of their observations. So, you see, I think their evidence would hold good at the bar of science. Huxley himself has paid the highest tribute to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. He said of "Divus Thomas" that his marvellous grasp and subtlety of intellect were almost without a parallel.

W. A. I wish life were long enough to let me entertain any hope of making their acquaintance! "Hereafter, in a better world than this, I shall desire more love and knowledge of them." But, to pass from the Fathers and the science of psychology, I should like to hear more about the connection between Catholicism and the art of fiction.

Mrs. Craigie. Why, surely, it is manifest. Analytic

fiction has always arisen and flourished in the neighbourhood of the confessional. Look at Racine, that exquisite psychologist-was he not a pupil of the Port Royal? And does not the modern analytic novel take its origin in France, among men who, though some of them rejected Catholicism, one and all sprang from Catholic surroundings and were familiar with the theory and practice of confession? Look at Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Bourget, Renan-all products of Catholicism, even if some of them fell away from the fold. And remember that Russia, the country of Turgueneff, Dostoieffsky, Tolstoy, is also a country of the confessional. Why, it stands to reason-no Protestant searches his conscience, or habitually weighs his actions and scrutinises their motives, as every Catholic must. Believe me, the analytic fiction of Protestants has always taken its analytic bent under Catholic influences.

W. A. I think I could name one or two exceptions to the rule. I don't see what Catholic influence stimulated the genius of that sturdy Protestant Samuel Richardson, or, indeed, of Jane Austen. And, for that matter, what do you make of Shakespeare?

Mrs. Craigie. My strongest case in point! He may or may not have been a Catholic himself (I think there is a very strong probability that he was); but at all events it is beyond dispute that he perfectly understood Catholicism, and was familiar with its rites and practices. Look at Romeo and Juliet, for instance,—the relation between Juliet and Friar Lawrence, and between Romeo and the Friar, is the relation between penitent and confessor, quite accurately portrayed.

And see how Shakespeare has carefully eliminated the anti-Catholic bias of the man from whom he borrowed the theme—what was his name?

W. A. Arthur Brooke, I think.

Mrs. Craigie. ——who declares that he tells the story as an awful warning against the practice of "conferring with superstitious friars." Believe me, Shakespeare knew all about the confessional.

W. A. Well, on the general point, I can bring you another, probably unexpected, ally. It would be hard, I fancy, to trace any Catholic influence on Henrik Ibsen; but in a very well-known epigram he has said: "At digte, det er at holde Dommedag over sig selv" (Poetical creation means holding Judgment-Day upon yourself). That is, in another form, your idea that constant self-examination makes the great artist; only, in Ibsen's view, the poet is his own confessor.

Mrs. Craigie. I have sometimes thought of writing a drama round one of the great Catholic soul-searchers; but the subject would be too impracticable for the modern public, in the theatre or out of it.

W. A. It would be difficult, certainly. Was it a blank-verse play you had in mind?

Mrs. Craigie. It would have to be in verse; and people have no patience for analytic or philosophical blank-verse now-a-days. They want gorgeous rhetoric and lyric fervour.

W. A. That is just it. The difference between Stephen Phillips's work and the terrible blank-verse tragedies of our fathers and grandfathers lies not only in his inventive and constructive power, but especially in the lyrical quality of his verse. But, Mrs. Craigie,

I don't see why you should not treat, in the form of modern drama, some of those crises of the spiritual life which interest you so much, and are, indeed, essentially interesting and dramatic, from whatever point of view one regards them. For instance, why should you not tell us the story-surely no such uncommon one-of a young girl who determines, in opposition to the wishes of her family and the entreaties of her lover, to obey the vocation of a religious life, and enter a convent? That is a conspicuously dramatic theme, full of struggle and stress-essentially pathetic, yet not without opportunities for humour, too, in the comments of her worldly relations. And no one could possibly treat it with more authority, more intimate knowledge, than you. The play would be entirely novel-daring in a way-and yet I am confident that, just on that account, it would have every chance of success.

Mrs. Craigie. It might, if it ever reached the public. But it never would. The managers would not look at it. "What!" they would say: "a serious play, turning upon a question of religion, and ending tragically!"—for they would regard the end as tragic—"Take it away!" they would say: "we will have none of it!" And perhaps, too, they would be right. The public does not want to think in the theatre, or to have the serious aspects of life forced upon its attention. What it chiefly wants is flattery. It wants to see its own weaknesses exalted, and its own shortcomings condoned. No dramatist ever yet made a "hit" by telling the truth—or showing it—about the majority. The safe rule is—"Throw a light on my distant, detestable neighbour, but leave me alone!" Don't you think so?

W. A. I am not sure that I do. I think you may denounce the sins of Society with all the fervour of Savonarola, and Society will not turn a hair. Invincible self-satisfaction is one of the bulwarks of the British character. We either do not recognise our own sins in those of our fictitious counterparts, or else we quietly acquit ourselves on the plea of extenuating circumstances. But I was not thinking so much of a moral as of a spiritual conflict in the play I suggest. Whatever the managers may say, people like a whiff of religion in the theatre. That taste has been coarsely ministered to in the "gospel melodrama" of a few seasons ago——

Mrs. Craigie. You refer to The Sign of the Cross. But remember the amusing, sensible Pagans who were not eaten by the lions.

W. A. I think you will find that there are religious instincts in the higher public as well as in the lower, which would respond to a play on a religious topic. Some one in *The School for Saints*, I remember, says, "I envy anybody who can speak of God as though He were as really alive as the Prince of Wales." Unlike most people now-a-days, you have that privilege: I don't see why you should abjure it in the theatre.

Mrs. Craigie. Would you have me devote three years of my life to a play that would never be acted? Several dramatists—Sardou, for instance—have tried the experiment of a serious play turning on a question of religion. They have all failed.

W. A. Because they approached it without conviction, without sincerity.

Mrs. Craigie. Sincerity alone would not go far in such a case, without consummate technical skill.

W. A. Well, why should that consideration deter you?

Mrs. Craigie. You think, then, that women are capable of highly-sustained achievement in dramatic form?

W. A. I see no reason to doubt it.

Mrs. Craigie. Yet how few women-dramatists there are, or ever have been, in comparison with men!

W. A. At the end of the eighteenth century the same remark could have been made with regard to women-novelists. But the nineteenth century, you see, has placed women-novelists nearly, if not quite, on a level with men, in number no less than in talent. And did we not agree, a little while ago, that they had some exceptional advantages for character-study, which, after all, is the basis of drama as well as of fiction?

Mrs. Craigie. Of course I should be only too happy to accept that argument; but I can't help suspecting a flaw in it. Is character-study the basis of drama? Henri Beyle has said—admirably, I think—Tragedy is the development of an action, and comedy is the development of a character. Show the character by a succession of ideas.

W. A. Aristotle, to be sure, declares that plot is the more important element in tragedy.

Mrs. Craigie. Is it not clearly the case that there goes a constructive capacity to the highest drama—a power of grasping a great many factors and disposing them in a complex pattern—which is not required in narrative art?

W. A. Fiction, you mean, implies concentration along a single line, drama the simultaneous apprehension of all the features and relations of a more or less extensive surface. Perhaps there is something in that. It suggests the question why women, though they have been devoted to music since the birth of the art, have done nothing of the first order—or perhaps even of the second—in the way of composition.

Mrs. Craigie. They have, like Miss Maude Valérie White and Augusta Holmes, written exquisite songs, but produced no great operas or symphonies. That, I suppose, is because the higher forms of music, like the higher mathematics, demand a vast co-ordinative power -the faculty of educing order and beauty from an apparently limitless chaos of matter. And not only that: they require very considerable physical strength -emotional strength. However swift and comprehensive the mind may be, its power of sustained effort is restricted by the limitations of its indispensable servant, the body. There is one art you have not mentioned, in which I am convinced that women are prevented from attaining the highest eminence by sheer lack of physical strength-the art of painting. It takes an able-bodied man to paint a Rubens, a Velasquez, a Rembrandt, or a Sargent. I think in all our speculations upon the differences of faculty in the two sexes, we are rather apt to forget the effect of the fundamental difference in mere bodily power of endurance.

W. A. Very true; and I fear I am exemplifying that forgetfulness at this moment. You must be very tired——

Mrs. Craigie. Oh, I did not mean that as a hint.

W. A. If you confessed to your doctor that you had talked for two hours at a stretch on Shakespeare and the musical-glasses, do you think he would grant you absolution?

Mrs. Craigie. He would probably inflict some very unpleasant penance—with quinine in it.

W. A. Then you will suffer vicariously for my sin. I am truly penitent. Perhaps if you represent that to the doctor he will let you off. Good-bye. I do hope I have not really over-tired you.

Exit.

March, 1901.

Conversation IV. With Mr. Stephen Phillips.

Scene: The Smoking-Room of the — Club. Date, March 1901.

W. A. I am glad you could shake off your Old Man of the Sea, and spare me an evening.

Mr. Phillips. My Old Man of the Sea?

W. A. Ulysses, of course.

Mr. Phillips. Oh, as yet I am only sketching out the play. Besides, I can't really work in this biting weather. Can you?

W. A. I have to, whether I can or not. We poor devils of journalists can't pick and choose our moods, as you lordly poets can—and must, no doubt. If we had to use our imagination——

Mr. Phillips. I thought journalists did occasionally fall back on that faculty. Though for that matter I have found by experience that some of them not only have no imagination themselves, but resent it in others.

W. A. By experience, eh? Not, surely, in the case of your plays? I have only to-day been reading Mr. Gosse's remark as to the reception of *Paolo and Francesca*, that "this time the complacency of the critics was so universal as to be almost alarming." And as for *Herod*. I should have thought——

Mr. Phillips. Yes, yes; *Herod*, too, was very well treated on the whole, and I have no reason to complain of the acceptance it has met with.

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MR. STEPHEN PHILLIPS.

From a photograph by J. Russell & Sons, London

W. A. Complain, indeed! Why, it was a triumph! If any one had predicted ten—five—even three years ago, that such a poem, by a living English author, would be produced on the London stage, would be received with enthusiasm, and would run—how many nights did it run?

Mr. Phillips. Eighty performances.

W. A. Yes, and at such a large house as Her Majesty's, where one audience is almost equivalent to two at an ordinary theatre——

Mr. Phillips. An acting-manager has told me that he reckons eighty nights at Her Majesty's as about equal to a hundred and forty at the Haymarket or the St. James's.

W. A. Well, as I was saying, if any one three years ago had predicted such a success for such a play, we should all have laughed him to scorn. I am sometimes reckoned an extravagant optimist with regard to the English stage; but until that night—you remember?—when you read me Paolo and Francesca, even my optimism stopped short of imagining a revival of living poetic drama.

Mr. Phillips. But you don't quite understand. I am not for a moment saying that *Herod* did not have all the success it deserved; but it is a little disconcerting to find people bent on denying it the success it actually had. One used to think that God Himself could not undo the past; but what is impossible to God is child's-play to the theatrical paragraphist. He can unmake history and change a success into a failure at a stroke of his pen. "Eighty performances!" he says—I assure you I am quoting almost literally, and not from

one paper but from several—"Eighty performances! After this we may safely dismiss the poetic drama. The bubble has burst. The boom has collapsed"—and so on, through the whole litany of marvellous metaphors. Of course all this doesn't really re-make the past; it doesn't alter the facts; but it helps to make the future difficult, not only for me—one man is no great matter—but for every one who tries to do imaginative work. It engenders in the public mind a prejudice, a misgiving, an instinctive association of poetry with failure, that is very hard to fight against.

W. A. Yes, the paragraphist is a serious evil, no doubt. He is more influential than the critic, because he has "damnable iteration" at his command. By his policy of pin-pricks, he can tattoo a prejudice upon the public mind that nothing will eradicate. And then, as vou say, he can distort facts. The critic only gives his opinion; and though it often carries ridiculous weight with the unsophisticated public, it is, after all, nothing but an opinion, which will probably be contradicted in the next paper the reader opens. But the paragraphist professes to give, not opinions, but ascertained results. His assertions, especially as to "what the public wants," are put forward, not as the haphazard guesses they are, but rather as careful generalisations from what is assumed to be "inside knowledge." The paragraphist is the theatrical equivalent of the sporting tipster; and his assumption of sagacity is usually as groundless.

Mr. Phillips. Ah, there now is another point! What can be the reason of our British habit of making the drama an appendage to sport? They are treated as though they were intellectually quite on the same level

—with this difference, that the drama is not half so well patronised by the aristocracy. And, now that I think of it, there is one sporting paper which condescends to take cognisance not only of the stage, but of literature; for its critic was good enough to read Paolo and Francesca, and pronounce that there was "not a single line of poetry in it." Not one line, mark you! I don't enjoy adverse criticism more than other people: but neither do I resent it when it comes from a man of trained literary judgment. For instance, when I published a book of poems some years ago, you yourself attacked it——

W. A. Oh! Surely not!

Mr. Phillips. Well, attacked some things in it, at any rate, and that pretty sharply. Did I dream of complaining? Certainly not. It doesn't matter whether you were right or wrong. No one is infallible, and in this case the error may have been mine, or it may have been yours. But at any rate you knew what you were talking about, and had a right to your opinion. What I do resent is having my work condemned and dismissed by men who do not begin to understand what I am trying to do, and are consequently incapable of judging whether, and how far, I have succeeded in doing it. They only know that I have set a high ideal before me, and that of itself is enough to arouse their hostility. For work that does not attempt to rise above the commonplace, their complaisance is boundless.

W. A. There you are at the root of the matter. When a man is uncertain of his judgment, there is nothing he dreads so much as being "taken in" by what purports to be good. That is the ultimate humiliation. "When

in doubt, be superior," is the first maxim of critical sagacity. It is rather flattering than otherwise to be reproached for over-severity; but to be twitted with having admired a thing that some whipper-snapper sets up to despise is the very gall of bitterness. Oh, I speak from experience! I have never felt the slightest trepidation in condemning a play; but to praise a play has often called for a good deal of courage. And if I have done any service to the drama, it is because I have not, habitually at any rate, fallen into the easy and effective pose of superiority. I don't know which seems to me the more baneful in his influence: the critic who has no standard at all, and simply writes what he thinks will be "safe," or the critic (we have seen one or two of them) who applies to everything an impossible standard, such as would have nipped the Attic drama in the bud, and sterilised the spacious times of great Elizabeth.

Mr. Phillips. Don't you think—I am sure you agree with me—that the English stage has paid very dearly for the spacious times of great Elizabeth?

W. A. To be sure it has. Not too dearly—it would be hard to pay too dearly for *Macbeth*, As You Like It, Antony and Cleopatra—but it has certainly paid their full price.

Mr. Phillips. What I feel is that the poetic drama has for two centuries and more been crushed beneath the weight of the Shakespearean ideal. Poets have tried to write like Shakespeare, and critics have urged them on, not recognising that, though his matter was for all time, his form, his technique, was for his own age, and no other. It needed Shakespeare, and no lesser man, to infuse any permanent vitality into the

measureless complications of the Shakespearean drama. I often think that the art of the Elizabethans was typical of the Anglo-Saxon genius, as described by Lord Rosebery—the genius for "muddling through somehow." Shakespeare breathed upon chaos, and chaos quivered into immortal life. But even his great contemporaries seldom or never performed the same miracle; and all subsequent attempts to imitate it have ended in disaster. Or am I wrong? Can you name a play on the Shakespearean model, written since the Restoration, that has any real life in it?

W. A. That is certainly a poser. There must at one time have been some sort of life in the works of Otway and Rowe and those late seventeenth-century men; but it is extinct enough now, in all conscience. Besides, they did not derive from Shakespeare, but rather from the inferior Elizabethans. The tragedy of the eighteenth century, again, seems to me to have imitated everything that was dull, turgid, and bad in seventeenth-century work; and the Shiels and Sheridan Knowlesses of the first half of the nineteenth century practically continued the same tradition.

Mr. Phillips. The fact is, surely, that down to about the middle of the nineteenth century there were always actors whose sheer force of declamation could put a sort of momentary life into the dullest and deadest of work; but that with the extinction of this race of actors (Macready, I take it, was the last) the whole of that dismal literature crumbled away to dust and ashes, like the body in Edgar Poe's story. And a good thing too!

W. A. Granted, with all my heart. But, I repeat, I

don't think Shakespeare was really responsible for the greater part of this literature. It was pseudo-Elizabethan, no doubt, but not pseudo-Shakespearean. Its ancestry is rather to be traced to Massinger, and Beaumont, and Fletcher. Then, I should say, in the first half of last century, the influence of Charles Lamb set people to imitating the more concentrated and less fluent of the Elizabethans, or rather Jacobeans—Shakespeare in the plays he wrote after Elizabeth's death, Webster, Ford, and Tourneur.

Mr. Phillips. Well, and do you think anything good —anything living—came of that?

W. A. Little enough. Mainly abortions like the plays of Thomas Lovell Beddoes. As for Browning, he seems to me to have had one-third of a dramatist in him. He had the analytic faculty, but not the synthetic faculty required for the presentation, the projection, of character; and he had no glimmering of the art of telling a story. I always think—but here I know you will disagree with me—that Tennyson was the one man of last century who, if he had been caught young, so to speak, might have put real life into the poetic drama.

Mr. Phillips. I do disagree with you: but why should you be so sure of that in advance?

- W. A. Because I know, from things I have heard you say, that you are a heretic with regard to Alfred the Great.
- Mr. Phillips. You are quite mistaken. I am continually fighting against the obsession of his distilled beauty. But I do not think that at any time of his life he would have made a great dramatist. He lacked two essential qualities: directness and passion. Tennyson

winds round and round a thing; he never faces it, fair and square, as Byron often does. And of real passion, as opposed to ornamental and often inappropriate rhetoric, I know of only one utterance in Tennyson—the poem called *Love and Duty*. Don't you remember the lines:—

O then, like those who clench their nerves and rush Upon their dissolution, we two rose,
There—closing like an individual life—
In one blind cry of passion and of pain,
Like bitter accusation ev'n to death,
Caught up the whole of love and utter'd it,
And bade adieu for ever.

No man who had the making of a dramatist in him could have written the parting of Lancelot and Guinevere in the *Idylls*.

W. A. What do you make of Maud?

Mr. Phillips. For "Monodrama" read "Melodrama." No, it is as a lyrist that Tennyson is incomparable.

W. A. I shall always maintain that there are splendidly dramatic things in *Queen Mary* and *Harold*, though as a whole they fail, because, coming to his task too old, the poet had not the strength to rebel against the Shakespearean form, but rather slavishly imitated it.

Mr. Phillips. Well, then, we come back to our point of agreement, which is, that a deliberate rebellion against the Elizabethan tradition is the best hope for English poetic drama. That, at any rate, has always been my view; and I have tried to act up to it and enfranchise myself from the Shakespearean ideal. But people can't, or won't, see that. They assume as a

matter of course that I am imitating Shakespeare and imitating him badly. All they know about the poetic drama being gathered from Shakespeare, they think every drama that is written in verse must be judged by Shakespearean canons and no other.

W. A. I have heard people whose judgment is more or less entitled to respect complaining of both *Paolo and Francesca* and *Herod* that they are thin, sketchy—spirited scenarios rather than fully-elaborated dramas.

Mr. Phillips. Yes, there you have it! There is no underplot, no philosophic embroidery, no minute development of character. I know there is not-but is drama impossible without these things? I may yet come to do more in the way of characterisation than I have hitherto attempted. But is there not such a thing as large and simple character? Must it always be subtle and complex? And is character the only element in drama? Do not action and passion count for something? The Greeks thought they did; Corneille thought so, and Racine. It is no new thing I am attempting. It is a thing familiar to every one who knows anything of dramatic literature beyond the beaten track of Shakespeare. I seek after unity of effect, where the Elizabethans sought after multiplicity. They tried to get the whole variegated texture of life into their pictures-

W. A. That is the very ideal which our ablest neo-Elizabethan, John Davidson, put forward the other day as his own. "Art is selection," he said, "and great art always selects as much of the world as it can. I should like to put the whole universe into everything I write."

Mr. Phillips. My effort is to eliminate everything

except the essentials of character, action, and passion—to admit nothing that shall not help on the action, though possibly by seeming to retard it. I strive after compression, not expansion—after surface calm, even quietude, with the glow of passion beneath it. But sometimes I think the fates are against me. Sometimes I wonder whether there is not, in this classical ideal, if I may call it so, something foreign and antipathetic to the British genius.

- W. A. Never believe it. If you succeed in realising your ideal, if you go on producing vital drama of the type imposed on you by your taste and your talent, never fear but that the British genius will accommodate itself to the accomplished fact. Contrariwise, as Tweedledum would say, the French genius was supposed to be incapable of producing or accepting romantic drama, until Hugo and Dumas appeared on the scene, and motley was the only wear. The national genius is moulded by the genius of the individual, and all our generalisations as to the proclivities and limitations of this race and that, even if they be not erroneous from the outset, may be tripped up at any moment by a single impertinent convolution in the brain of a single man.
- Mr. Phillips. I don't know. When people are accustomed to the red-hot thing, they are apt to fancy that the white-hot thing is cold; and it is very hard to persuade them to the contrary.
- W. A. But have I not seen it stated that in *Ulysses* you are departing from these principles, and trying to produce something in the nature of an Elizabethan Masque, rather than a condensed, organic drama?

- Mr. Phillips. No, no; the opposite is the fact. The whole task before me is to make out of a series of disconnected episodes a well-knit drama, with "a beginning, a middle, and an end." My whole case, as against the Elizabethan drama, is that I claim to be judged rather by the cumulative effect of a whole work than by isolated, and even irrelevant, patches of splendour. In regard to painting, for instance, one does not say, "This is a great picture in right of that one beautiful head, though all the rest is crude and out of drawing." The whole effect is the only true effect. But the English nation is suspicious of anything in which the effort is not rendered obvious by partial failure—as, in a circus, they will give the loudest applause to the man who has once or twice failed to go through his hoop, if only he ultimately succeeds. That a play, then, should be smooth, limpid, and concentrated, arouses in them a certain instinct of resentment. So. at least, it sometimes seems to me.
- W. A. Tell me, what first turned your thoughts in the direction of the theatre?
- Mr. Phillips. Why, George Alexander's suggestion that I should write a play for him.
- W. A. Oh, but before that—surely you must have felt some instinctive bias towards drama?
- Mr. Phillips. While I was with Benson, I wrote a play, and gave it to him. He kept the manuscript for months. At the end of the season, I went to his room to say good-bye to him. We talked a few minutes, and then, just as I was going out, he said, "Oh, there's this!" and handed me the manuscript. That was all I ever heard of it,—all I ever did with it. I dare say

his implied judgment of it was quite just, though I still think there was something in the mere idea.

W. A. What was it?

Mr. Phillips. Oh, a sort of Frankenstein idea, only that the monster was amiable instead of maleficent. But it is quite vague to me now.

W. A. Do you find your practical experience as an actor of much service to you in writing for the stage?

Mr. Phillips. Of the very greatest. It enables me to see the stage-picture bodily before my eyes, to realise every position of the characters, and to avoid, I hope, impossible conjunctures and combinations.

W. A. Ah, yes, that is of enormous importance. That is where so many people, both writers and readers of drama, fail—they have no mental vision of the scene.

Mr. Phillips. When I read Herod to Tree—I read him the third act first, I must tell you—he was at the outset bored, sceptical, and wanted nothing so much as to get through with it. Gradually he grew more and more interested and excited, until I came to the passage where trumpets are heard in the distance. At that point he sprang from his seat. "Ha!" he said to his secretary, "you see the reason of that?" Then he turned to me, and said: "Have you ever been on the stage?" He didn't know that I began life as an actor, but he divined it in that one touch.

W. A. He has an extraordinary instinct for the picturesque.

Mr. Phillips. Has he not? Could anything have been finer than his stage-management of the last act of *Herod?* And remember there was real and high imagination in it: true invention—no mere workingup of old stage tricks.

W. A. Then, after Ulysses, what have you in view?

Mr. Phillips. Oh, that is a long way to look forward. The subject that perhaps attracts me most—an intensely dramatic story—is barred by our sapient censorship.

W. A. And what is that?

Mr. Phillips. The story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba.

W. A. Oh dear, oh dear, you mustn't dream of such a thing! Remember you are in a free country, where the absolute decree of a gentleman in a back yard at St. James's can rob you of the work of years, without appeal and without redress, if it happens to clash with his prejudices or the "traditions of his office." In godless and tyrant-ridden countries like France, Italy, and Germany, Racine couldwrite Esther and Athalie, Alfieri, Saul, Sudermann Johannes. But in free, enlightened and virtuous England, such enormities are not to be thought of. You may travesty and degrade religion in The Sign of the Cross, but you must not lay unhallowed hands on an episode in Old Testament history.

Mr. Phillips. I suppose I should have to do as Massinger did with the story of Herod—make the characters mediæval Italians, or something of that sort, and so lose all the colour and character of the theme. No, I shall not do that; but I have another theme in my head. What do you say to the Tragedy of Wealth?—the idea of a man who inherits millions, and gradually realises how the millions have been built up

through injustice, oppression, cruelty, until they become accursed in his eyes, and he can neither use them nor shake himself free of them? I think there is a tragedy in that—don't you?

W. A. Certainly—a fine one. Bernard Shaw has approached the idea of the analysis of wealth from the satiric, the farcical, side; but you will have the tragic aspect of the theme all to yourself. What about form, though? If you don't treat wealth under modern conditions, the fable will lose half its force; and, on the other hand, do you think blank verse is compatible with modern costume?

Mr. Phillips. I don't see why it shouldn't be. But I might write the play in prose.

W. A. Westland Marston tried the experiment of modern drama in blank verse, without any very decisive result, one way or another. But Westland Marston was only a somewhat subdued Sheridan Knowles.

Mr. Phillips. Tree, oddly enough, encourages me to try it in blank verse. He sees no difficulty in the matter. And now, good-night. I have just time to catch my train.

W. A. One word more: when are we to see Paolo and Francesca?

Mr. Phillips. As soon as Alexander can get it cast. But when that may be, heaven knows! There are actors for all the four parts, but the difficulty is to get them all into one theatre—a "tedious difficulty" indeed, as Iago says. It is the aim of every actor and actress to be the manager of his or her own theatre, and in playing in any other theatre than their own,

they consider that they are "lowering" themselves and losing caste. And the difficulty is even greater in the case of actresses than of actors. If there is a dearth of the one, there is a positive famine of the other. How, then, is one to get an all-round performance of a poetic drama?

W. A. Well, well, I am an incurable optimist as regards the stage. I have seen so many insuperable difficulties overcome in my time, I don't doubt that this will be added to the list. Good-night, if you must go—and be of good cheer as to the future.

March, 1901.



MR. GEORGE MOORE
From a drawing by Will, H. Rothenstein.

Conversation V. With Mr. George Moore.

Scene: Mr. Moore's study in Victoria Street, Time: Evening.

Mr. Moore. At last! For years past you have promised to come and see me—you've come at last.

W. A. You were more accessible in the Temple—to me at least. But what a pretty room you have here!

Mr. Moore. I like a low ceiling. You are just in time to see the rooms, for I am leaving my flat and going to Ireland in less than a month.

W. A. What! You are really in earnest about that?

Mr. Moore. I never was more in earnest. My duty takes me to Ireland. I shall miss Wood's concerts, and the opera, and the picture-galleries, and many friends. But when once you feel that a thing is wrong, you can't go on doing it.

W. A. That is an exalted view of human nature. But where is the crime in living in London?

Mr. Moore. I am an Irishman, and, to adapt Tourgueneff's saying, Ireland can do without any one of us, but none of us can do without Ireland. But even if I were not Irish, I could not live in London any longer.

W. A. Why not?

Mr. Moore. The moral atmosphere is unbearable—at least by me. Even so lately as Gladstone's day there were some remnants of moral sense in the national life. He represented all that is noble in the national character, just as the present Government represent all the inferior

qualities. Why should I live in London to witness the destruction of beautiful buildings and the erection of "artistic" villa residences? Why should I live in London to read bad accounts of bad literature in the papers? Do you think the modern playhouse holds out any inducement to me to remain? But I know you agree with me about the theatre, so I won't enlarge on that.

W. A. Agree with you! Why, I disagree with you so utterly that if we once start on that topic we shall never get off it again. And, in the meantime, I want to hear more of your reasons for shaking the dust of London off your feet.

Mr. Moore. I must escape from the Brixton Empire.

W. A. British Empire, you mean.

Mr. Moore. I call it the Brixton Empire.

W. A. Oh, I see! Thank you—the surgical operation is complete.

Mr. Moore. This empire of vulgarity, and greed, and materialism and hypocrisy, that is crawling round the whole world, throttling other races and nationalities—all for their own good, of course!—and reducing everything to one machine-made Brixton pattern.

W. A. So you expect to find in Ireland a green oasis in a wilderness of khaki?

Mr. Moore. I am going to find a primitive people, in place of a sophisticated—I may say a decadent—people. I am going in search of air that I can breathe without choking. The first concern of every man is the moral atmosphere in which he lives. Some people are quite at their ease in an atmosphere of cruelty, lust of gold, and all the gratifications of the senses. Others

desire an atmosphere in which tenderness, and pity for humanity, and the cultivation of ideas, count for more than so-called material advantages.

W. A. And you are going-?

Mr. Moore. Well, my duty is there: I am going at last to do my duty. I have been an absentee landlord -I have behaved wrongly in every way! It is only of late, when I have seen how insatiate Imperialism was degrading the English race, that I have recognised how all art, all morality, all spiritual life, is rooted in nationality. I am going, so far as in me lies, to help Ireland to recover her own language, and save her soul. Do you know that Ireland has the most beautiful legendary literature in the world? The sagas of Diarmuid and Grania, of Deirdre and the rest-to say nothing of more modern literature—are the birthright of every Irishman. But if the Anglification of Ireland goes on unchecked, the Irishman will soon have bartered his birthright for a mess of Tit-Bits. The question now is whether Ireland is to retain her individuality, or to become like a repainted picture. For Ireland never can acquire the qualities of the English race, any more than a Dutch picture can acquire the quality of an Italian picture. Surely you can see that it would not be an advantage for the whole world to speak English-a language overworn by four hundred years of literature and by millions of newpapers.

W. A. Stop a moment! Let us make sure where we are! You are mixing up two propositions which have no necessary interdependence: first, the benefit to Ireland of preserving her own literature in her own language; second, the exhaustion of English. It is

clearly conceivable that Irish might be worth reviving even if English were not exhausted. I think, if you will allow me to say so, that you weaken your case by making the one proposition seem to depend on the other. Tell me first about the splendours of Irish, and then we will come back in due time to the miseries of English. Do you speak Irish?

Mr. Moore. No. I was brought up in an Irishspeaking district, but it was thought a disgrace at that time to know anything of the language.

W. A. Do you read Irish?

Mr. Moore. No; but I have come to the conclusion that it is no use to preach unless I practise, and I have determined to learn Irish.

W. A. Then, for the present, your knowledge of Irish literature is, like my own, acquired at secondhand, through the medium of English. Of course your knowledge is much wider than mine; but you cannot be more thoroughly convinced than I am of the surpassing beauty of Irish legend. There is a peculiar quality in the Irish imagination, in the Irish view of nature and of life, that has an extraordinary fascination for me. And the individuality of Irish legend, of the Irish imagination, seems to remain quite intact, even when it finds expression in English. Take W. B. Yeats, for instance—a man whose work you can't admire more than I do. He is Irish-is he not?-in a very different sense from that in which John Davidson, for example, is Scotch. No one writes purer or more delicate English than Yeats; yet if his Wanderings of Oisin, and Countess Kathleen, and Land of Heart's Desire, do not breathe the essential, most intimate

spirit of Irish mythology and folklore, you may—call me a Dutchman.

Mr. Moore. The question is not whether Irish legend can be adequately translated into English, but whether the Irish nation is to preserve the characteristics which it has inherited from immemorial time and from immemorial seas and mountains. Whether Yeats writes good English or bad is of very little importance compared to the continuance of the race—and a race in my opinion cannot continue, nor can it develop its special genius, if it have not a language. The language is the original soul.

W. A. Yeats's poems are not "translations"; they are re-creations of Irish legend in English. And supposing that something is lost in the process of re-creation, is the leakage so great as to make it worth while for Ireland to stanch it by shutting herself off from the stream of world-culture?

Mr. Moore. You must be parochial in the beginning to become ultramontane in the end. The first example that occurs to me is that of the Athenians. They thought of Attica and only of Attica; and Attica has proved sufficient for the whole world. It is only by writing for the few that you write, in the end, for many nations. Besides, you talk as if Erse were a dead language, that had to be exhumed. It is not. It is a living language, with an ancient, mediæval, and modern literature. Then, again, no one proposes to make Erse the only language of Ireland. We shall be a bilingual people, like the Swiss and the Bretons, and the Welsh for that matter. English will remain the

language of business, of intercourse with the Brixton Empire, no doubt of science as well——

- W. A. (interrupting). The Cinderella, in fact—the common drudge.
- Mr. Moore. (continuing). ——while Irish will be the language of poetry, of philosophy, of religion——
 - W. A. And of politics, eh?
- Mr. Moore. Politics, belonging both to the ideal and to the practical life, will probably be bilingual.
- W. A. And how long do you think it will take for a noble popular literature in Erse to drive out *Tit-Bits* and Anglo-Saxon vulgarity in general?
- Mr. Moore. I do not stop to consider if it be possible to make Irish the national language of Ireland: even if I knew that that were impossible, I should continue to strive to save the Irish language from extinction. I can conceive no nobler task.
- W. A. Tell me, now: is there a standard, recognised modern Irish language, ready for use in literature?
- Mr. Moore. Well, there are two schools of writers in Irish——
 - W. A. (aside). Already!
- Mr. Moore. ——who differ as to the treatment of local dialects. Some—like Dr. Douglas Hyde, for instance—would use no words that are not common to all dialects and understood over the length and breadth of Ireland. Others would give free scope to the vernacular of every district.
- W. A. Now as to spelling—is Erse as impracticable as its cousin, the Gaelic of the Scotch Highlands?

Mr. Moore. Erse and Gaelic are not two languages, but one. And as for spelling, I have no knowledge on the subject, but it is difficult for me to believe that the spelling of Erse is less representative of the spoken word than the spelling of English.

W. A. I hope your Irish Academy-for I suppose you will have an Academy-will not be tempted to follow that will-o'-the-wisp, phonetic spelling. If you once make spelling subservient to the inevitable slovenlinesses of speech, you throw open the floodgates of degeneration. There must be an ideal language, not realised in the speech of any one district, or class, or even of any one man, which shall outlast, and, as it were, keep on absorbing and obliterating, all local and temporary divergences. It is only an ideal language that can resist degradation in the mouths of men. Once admit the right of any man, or set of men, to attempt the representation in literature of his or their actual utterance, and your language will presently lose its individuality in an endless ramification of dialects. In other words, dissolution will have set in. But by keeping an ideal-an object of constant aspirationbefore people's eyes, you counteract the centrifugal by a centripetal force, and may indefinitely prolong the life of the language.

Mr. Moore. Now, my dear fellow, what nonsense this is! Why should a language, of all things, be exempt from the universal law of change, development, transformation? Have we not the history of unnumbered languages in the past to teach us what is the inevitable process of development and decay?

W. A. No doubt you will tell me that language is

the garment of thought, and that every language must, in course of time, get worn out, like any other garment.

Mr. Moore. It is much more than the garment of thought. It is the very seed from which thought springs.

W. A. And perishes like a seed, I suppose, in producing the harvest? Is it on this convenient metaphor that you found your theory (to come back to that point) of the exhaustion, the decrepitude of English?

- Not on any metaphor. On observation and manifest analogies in the history of language. Look at Latin, for instance: it grew obscurely for unnumbered years; then it flowered for about two centuries in a great literature; and then it dragged on for ten centuries, the literary language of every country in Europe, yet incapable of producing anything that survives as literature. At last there came a great man who had the insight to recognise that while Latin was all very well for theology, it was useless for literature. Dante began to write the Divina Commedia in Latin; but he presently gave that up, and, writing in the vulgar tongue, created a new literature. There have been two literatures in Italy, because there have been two languages. In Greece, on the other hand, there has been only one literature, because the language, though it has degenerated, has not renewed itself. Modern Greek is Ancient Greek, not rejuvenated, but senile.
- W. A. Now for the application of all this to the case of English?
- Mr. Moore. Is it not obvious? After obscurely preparing itself for ages, English put forth a great flower of literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Then every one wrote well, because the language was, in itself, beautiful. And—mark this !—no one troubled his head about style. The Elizabethans dreamt not of it. Style—that is to say, the necessary filtration of a language which has become corrupt—began with Milton.

W. A. But surely some of the loveliest English that heart can desire was produced in the nineteenth century.

Mr. Moore. Yes, men of individual genius, by taking elaborate thought and pains, have created a Silver Age. But no one in the nineteenth century could do as the translators of the Bible did-produce beautiful English by simply writing the popular speech of the time, which was beautiful in the early seventeenth century just as the architecture of the streets was beautiful. Walter Pater, whom I shall always regard as the last great writer of English, declared that his aim was to treat English as he would a dead language. And now-now that English has become the battered instrument of ten thousand journalists, from Mr. Kipling downwards, all the world over-who can hope to extract a single pure tone from it? Believe me. my dear Archer-literature will take refuge in the small languages, the virgin languages, and leave English to work out its destiny as the Volapuk of commerce and wholesale fiction.

W. A. Where, oh where, can I buy an Irish grammar? It is not too late! I will learn Irish and produce literature as the sparks fly upward. But one thing troubles me: I thought Irish was an extremely ancient language, far older than English. How do I know that it, too has not put forth its flower, and fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf?

- Mr. Moore. It has not, and the reason is plain. Its development was arrested centuries ago by English invasion and conquest. Its vital force has never been exhausted. It is like the handful of wheat in an Egyptian mummy-case—give it light, air, and soil, and it will bring forth its harvest an hundredfold.
- W. A. Well, more power to it, say I! Seriously, I think it would be worse than stupid on England's part to throw any obstacle in the way of the revival of Irish. If the movement is genuine, discouragement will not put it down. If it is factitious, it will die out of its own accord. Personally, I should be very sorry if English literature had in future to do without the contributions from Ireland, which have so greatly enriched it in the past. But never mind! I dare say English literature will survive even the death of Pater and the birth of the Gaelic League. For, to tell the truth, you have not convinced me of the hopeless decadence of English.

Mr. Moore. If you don't feel it—as Pater did—of course mere argument will not bring it home to you.

W. A. My view is that, by treating English as a dead language, Pater, for all his accomplishment, succeeded in missing greatness. As for your deductions from the fate of the classical languages, surely the decadence of Greek and Latin is to be traced to political causes rather than to any inherent law of linguistic decay. They declined, partly when they no longer had a healthy and inspiring national life behind them, partly because they came to be written in ever-increasing measure by men of alien birth, to whom they remained more or less recalcitrant, and who introduced

all sorts of solecisms and patavinities. No fresh intellectual impulse came to put new life into the languages.

Mr. Moore. What about the Alexandrian philosophy? What about Christianity?

W. A. Well, I am given to understand that the Alexandrian philosophers found Greek no bad instrument for their purposes. As for Christianity—it is true in the main, I take it, that Christianity tended to degrade both Greek and Latin. And why? Because it was an alien cult; because its sacred writings were composed by ignorant barbarians; because it attracted to itself not, primarily, men of Hellenic or Latin stock, but all the heterogeneous peoples of the Mediterranean basin.

Mr. Moore. Well, then, whatever the cause, you don't deny the effect?

W. A. But it is precisely the cause or causes we are disputing about. You maintain that Greek and Latin perished from some inward principle of paralysis or corruption which must affect all literary languages, after approximately similar intervals of time. I am trying to suggest to you that the decay of both these languages was due to outward circumstances, political and social, which have no tendency to repeat themselves in the modern world.

Mr. Moore. The decay of Latin set in the very moment the Roman Empire had spread over the known world, just as the Brix—I beg your pardon—the British Empire has spread during the past century.

W. A. Don't be led astray by the word "Empire."
Consider the difference of the cases. The Roman

Empire imposed its official language, more or less imperfectly, upon the existing local populations, Gauls, Iberians, Numidians, and the rest. Hence there arose an infinitude of local patois, which stood to classical Latin in the relation of Baboo-English or Negro-English to the language of Dr. Johnson. The British Empire and the America Republic, on the other hand———

- Mr. Moore. Yes, the Anglo-Saxon race has done its beneficent work more thoroughly than the Latin: it has not imposed its language on the Red Indians, the Australian blackfellows, the Tasmanians, the Maoris—it has adopted the simpler plan of exterminating them.
- W. A. A hit, I confess—a palpable hit! But it is a flank attack—not quite in the line of our present discussion. What is the result, then? That throughout North America and Australasia we have vast populations speaking English as their native language, unaffected, or inappreciably affected, by the indigenous tongues of the various regions, and without any greater difference of dialect than the difference between Yorkshire and Devonshire.
- Mr. Moore. Yes, as I said, English is now the vulgar Volapuk of journalism, commerce, and "imperialist" politics, just as Latin became a Volapuk of law, statecraft, and theology.
- W. A. But don't you see the world-wide difference? Latin became more and more the artificial language of a learned class, from which the living, natural dialects fell away into even wider divergence. Everywhere the learned class saw a perpetual disintegration of speech going on among the populace, and they inevitably made

fixity, petrifaction, an ideal, in order to rescue one idiom from the general deliquescence. There was no healthy give-and-take between the learned tongue and the vernacular. Remember, too, that the learned classmainly, as the years went on, composed of celibate churchmen-was not an hereditary caste. Very few people were born into it, while it was perpetually recruited from the patois-speaking populace. Thus no one wrote in his mother-tongue. The vernacular language was not written at all, the learned language was not spoken from childhood by the people who wrote it. Think how difficult—how well-nigh impossible—it is for a man to produce fine literature in a language that is not his mother-tongue, whatever the inherent resources of that language may be! No, no, my dear Moore—the decadence of Latin came, not from within, but from without. It was due to political circumstances, and to political circumstances not in the remotest degree analogous to those of the English-speaking world at the present moment. It is possible, I admit, that Latin, as a synthetic language, may have been linguistically doomed to disintegration, even apart from political influences. But in that case its history does not help us to forecast the fate of an analytic language like English.

Mr. Moore. That question I cannot go into. You will not understand my point—that a language is only capable of expressing a certain number of ideas, and that when these have been expressed the language is exhausted. Thought cannot live in a dead language, any more than you could live in the moon.

W. A. I understand your contention well enough;

only I doubt the truth of it. And when you point to the history of Latin in proof of your assertion, I say I read that history differently.

Mr. Moore. Yes, you dream that civilisation will suppress the barbarian; whereas, on the contrary, it begets him. The scientific barbarian is worse than the shepherd, the villa-dweller is worse than the cavedweller. (The cave-dweller drew better.) There will be plenty of barbarians in the Brixton Empire: the journalists will take the place of the Gauls and the Iberians, the Goths and the Huns; and they will prove greater destroyers of language. It is the primitive folk who invent languages; it is the journalists who destroy The American wonders what to do with the negro population. The negro in America is the seed of future literature; for when the journalists have killed the language, when it becomes incapable even of journalese, the negro will be inventing the new idiom. Singing at their work, the Hungarian peasants invent musical phrases, the gipsy develops them on his fiddle. Many musical phrases, and some of the most beautiful, have arisen in this way. The negro will invent the new language, the man of letters will apply it to literary purposes.

W. A. Ah, you Irishmen! There's no suppressing your rollicking humour. Not even a stolid Scot like myself can keep you serious for many minutes together. I really must learn Erse. When I have mastered it, perhaps I shall no longer "jock wi' deeficulty," but throw off brilliant things, like your negro theory, without thinking of it.

Mr. Moore. But I assure you I am not joking.

- W. A. You seriously believe that in the America of the future the stream of English undefiled will be swallowed up in a café-au-lait dialect—the language of Uncle Remus, if not of Brudder Bones? No, no—you are burlesquing your own pessimism.
- Mr. Moore. You are burlesquing my theory, which is neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but a plain forecast of probabilities. To return, however, to the destructive forces contained in the Brixton Empire-they far exceed those which destroyed the Latin language. Art was religion until the Renaissance—the verses of Catullus and Virgil were not written for money, nor did the writer think of any audience except his circle of friends. The Cathedral of Chartres was not built for money. Money did not come into Art until the Renaissance. Money has called shoals of scribblers out of the depths. They come like the herring, and they write anything they think the public will buy-domestic novels, military novels, theological novels. The literature of the present day is written to please the largest possible audience, just as the houses are built, and the furniture and the china designed, to suit every one. In the Roman Empire everything was made by hands. Now the hands of man are becoming useless. The future man will possibly retain some rudiments of hands, which will remind those who live in the ages that have outlived beauty that man was once an artist, just as his rudimentary tail now reminds us that he was once an ape.
- W. A. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps Art is only a passing phase in the childhood of humanity—like the mimetic stage in a child's development. After all, whether you like it or not, good art is the art that

makes for knowledge, while bad art makes for ignorance, or rather, for what is worse, for knowledge falsely so called. Perhaps all our copying of the body and mind of man, of the colours, lights and shadows of nature, has only been a means to the end of more thorough comprehension. Perhaps Art has, all the time, only held a candle to Science. Perhaps Science is the enemy of Art, as the sea may be called the enemy of the tributary river which is absorbed and lost in it.

Mr. Moore. That is not only not what I meant, but it seems to me pure nonsense. Science is certainly the enemy of Art, if in no other sense, then in this, that it is destructive of mystery, of imagination. Art is impossible without mystery, and there is no mystery left in the world. No art is to be expected of the unhappy people born after the sources of the Nile had been discovered.

W. A. There is still the North Pole—and after that the South Pole—and after that the other side of the moon—and then the planets—and then the stars—and behind them, God.

Mr. Moore. Oh, what mystery is left about the planets and the stars? Haven't we weighed them, and photographed them, and spectrum-analysed them! Photography! There you have the art of to-day, and of the coming age of scientific barbarism. Steel engraving is dead. Wood engraving has just ended with Tenniel. The human eye, no less than the human hand, is falling into disuse. Instead of the picture, we have the photograph; instead of the engraving, the "process block."

W. A. I see your pessimism is incorrigible. Are you taking the mantle of Ruskin to Ireland with you in

your rug-strap? Ruskin was chanting the *Dies Irw* to very much the same tune five-and-twenty years ago.

Mr. Moore. It is a good thing I have never read Ruskin. If it be true, as people tell me, that he said the same things, no doubt he said them so incomparably that, after him, I should never dare to open my mouth. Of course he was quite right, even twenty-five years ago. But within the past ten years there has been a further departure on the road to ruin. Can't you see how, visibly and on every hand, artistic perceptions have declined—and moral perceptions along with them?

W. A. Are the artistic perceptions of the nation so much duller now than they were, say, at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign?

Mr. Moore. Duller? Duller than they were in the days of Constable, of Cotman, of Turner? I should think so indeed! Why, my dear friend, it is impossible -but absolutely impossible!-to produce anything beautiful in this England of yours. Look at that coffee-cup you have just put down: it isn't anything much-only a piece of Swansea china-but you could not for a thousand pounds get such a cup made to-day. Look at that clock—the simplest thing in the world a quite ordinary piece of Louis Quinze workmanship: if you offered ten thousand pounds to-day for a design of equal simplicity and beauty, there isn't a man who could produce it. Look at that piano. It was made in 1810 or 1820, and it would be as impossible to produce as delicate a piece of marquetry to-day as it would be to build the Parthenon. All England to-day is incapable of producing so much as a beautiful chair.

W. A. I can fancy a George Moore of 1950 pointing

to his piano, and saying, "Look at that delightful old Steinway Concert Grand—a piece of early Edward VII. work—1900 or thereabouts: you couldn't get such an exquisite design to-day for love or money."

- Mr. Moore. It is possible that the Brixton Empire will succeed in producing a savage such as you describe—men who have so far outlived the age of beauty that they will think the nineteenth-century villa and chair beautiful.
- W. A Then the poet was right, it seems, when he told us that "Art stopped short in the cultivated court of the Empress Joséphine"?
- Mr. Moore. My dear fellow, Art has been dying ever since the Renaissance.
- W. A. Dear me! I'm very sorry. What about that Manet, then? And the Degas over there in the corner?
- Oh, here and there individual men of Mr. Moore. talent have caught glimpses of beauty; but Art, as the beautiful expression of a beautiful life, has been becoming rarer and rarer all over the world, and is now absolutely impossible in England. The other day, here in Victoria Street, I met my landlord, who is an architect, looking at a thing he had just put up-a shop-front or something-a hideous conglomerate of polished granite and porcelain and gilding. He said, "What do you think of it?" I saw a policeman on the other side of the street, and beckoned him across. "Look at that," I said. "What do you think of it?" "Well, sir," he said, "if you ask me, I think it's very ugly." "There!" said I to my landlord, "I know it's ugly, and the policeman knows it's ugly, and you your-

self know quite well that it's ugly—yet you go on putting it up—you can't help it: don't I tell you Art is bewitched!" And it is so, believe me, in England to-day. This Empire of yours is capable of nothing but the fiction of Kipling, the painting of Sargent, the drama of Pinero.

W. A. I decline to be lured into a discussion of The Second Mrs. Tanqueray. But tell me, have you seen Twelfth Night at Her Majesty's?

Mr. Moore. Oh, my dear Archer, don't speak of The theatre is the most barbarous corner of the whole Brixton Empire, and you know it as well as I do. I went to see Mr. Tree's Midsummer Night's Dream, and so far as I could understand, the interest of the audience was held by a tap that had been left running, and that drowned the voices of the actors. When I want to hear a tap running, I go to the scullery, not to the theatre. Yes, I saw Twelfth Night too-a small play enlarged, like a photograph, till it was out of all drawing, and every trace of composition had disappeared. The poor thing was like a man dragged out on the rack. It was played in a very verdant landscape, with rhododendrons. Now, red is the most difficult colour on the palette-hardly a painter can make use of itand the scene-painter's employment of it reminded me of the emptying of a pot of red currant jam into a pail of green peas. For the greater part of the time I was forced to sit with my eyes closed. There was no shadow anywhere, for there were limelights shining on this horrible greenery from both sides. Mr. Tree once challenged the opinion I had expressed on scene-painting in general; and I asked him how long he could look

at a fine Turner. Mr. Tree was somewhat perplexed; so I said, "Well, I suppose one could look at a Turner for about four or five minutes?" and he agreed. Then I said, "How long could you look at a Veronese?" He again paused, and I said, "Well, Veronese painted on a larger canvas: let us say six minutes." I then said. "Now, what about Tintoretto? He painted on an even larger canvas." Mr. Tree said, "Well, about seven minutes," and I acquiesced. "Now, Tree," I said, "you have agreed that only seven minutes can be spent at a time in contemplating a masterpiece, and yet you ask me to look at an abominable scenepainting, with two limelights upon it, for two hours. Now, is it reasonable?" I do not know if Mr. Tree has found an answer to my question yet. He certainly did not find one at the time.

W. A. Why, he very properly held his peace, because your question was an insult to his intelligence, and the answer too childishly obvious. You might as well say to Wagner, "You can't expect me to listen to the sawing of half-a-dozen bass-fiddles for two hours on end," as though the orchestra consisted exclusively of bass-fiddles. Mr. Tree does not ask you to look at any scene for two hours—no, nor for two minutes. He asks you to listen to the poetry and look at the acting for which the scene-painter has provided an appropriate and beautiful background.

Mr. Moore. But that is just what the scene-painter does not do. If you think he does, then you are incapable of liking Turner, Constable, and Cotman. You will admit that the man who delights in the wax models in a hairdresser's shop is incapable of appreci-

ating Michael Angelo and Donatello. Well, his case and yours are parallel, and any artist will tell you I am right—even an Academician. I assure you, in such performances of Shakespeare as we have seen of late, we have a clear view of what the world will be when all John Bull's ideals have come to pass—when Jericho is rebuilt on exactly the model of Brixton, when the North Pole has been discovered, when the telephone is everywhere, even at Lhassa, when the language of John Bull is spoken everywhere and written everywhere, when people are giving up foreign travel because even in the Sahara hot and cold water are laid on in the bedrooms. Oh, my dear Archer, the future is as terrible to contemplate as the fabled head of Medusa—it turns our hearts to stone.

W. A. And all this you see in Mr. Tree's revival of Twelfth Night! I had no idea it was so apocalyptic. But, at worst, there will always be Ireland, where a man with a soul can escape from scene-painting, hot and cold water, and the other horrors of John Bullism. I suppose in the Irish Theatre you will return to the bare stage of the Elizabethans—

Mr. Moore. Not at all.

W. A. Then what sort of scenery will you have?

Mr. Moore. Faded scenery, that doesn't distract and torture the eye. That is what we will have in Dublin, when the Irish Literary Theatre produces Diarmuid and Grania by Yeats and myself, with Dr. Hyde's Casad na Sugan in front of it.

W. A. What! a play in Irish!

Mr. Moore. Yes, of course. What is an Irish

theatre for if not for the fostering of drama in Irish?

W. A. I should like to be present on the first night, if only to hear the Dublin gallery-boy shouting, as the Edinburgh gallery-boy did when Home's *Douglas* was produced, "Whaur's your Wullie Shakespeare noo?" Only of course he will say it in Irish.

Mr. Moore. Well, if you come, we will show you how scenery ought to be treated in an artistic theatre.

W. A. I scarcely dare confess it, but I have this very day published an article eulogising the green-pea and red-currant-jam scene that caused you such agony. I suppose when I go—and I must presently—you will put your head over the banisters and shout after me, as Carlyle did in dismissing Anthony Trollope, "Let me tell you, sir, that you're gangin' straight to hell—and gangin' the vulgarest way, too!"

Mr. Moore. That is what I say of the Brixton Empire. As for you, my dear Archer, you are really a fellow of some insight, though you do your best to conceal it.

W. A. Thank you so much! Good-night.

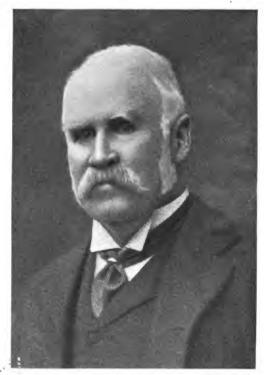
Mr. Moore. Stop a moment—I will walk with you to Victoria.

[Exeunt.

May, 1901.

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in



Conversation VI. With Mr. W. S. Gilbert.

Scene: The Library at Grim's Dyke. Time: A July afternoon. Discovered, Mr. W. S. Gilbert. To him enter W. A. At the same moment a strange, half-human little cry is heard from the direction of the fire-place.

W. A. (startled, turning). Dear me! what is that?

Mr. Gilbert (stroking a small gray animal with bright eyes and a bushy tail, curled up on a cushion in a red morocco easy-chair). This? Oh, it's a ring-tailed lemur, from Madagascar.

W. A. The voice sounded almost like a child's.

Mr. Gilbert. He very seldom makes a remark. As a rule he watches what is going on and keeps his opinions to himself.

W. A. He is a pretty little fellow.

Mr. Gilbert. He has none of the mischievous or the dirty habits of the monkey. That's why we keep him in the house instead of consigning him to the monkey-cage.

W. A. And this is his chair, is it?

Mr. Gilbert. Well, it's really my chair; but he thinks it's his.

W. A. (as two dogs come in from the lawn). You are fond of animals? I should think you have very good shooting in all that "forest primeval" I have just driven through.

Mr. Gilbert. It is a little strange—isn't it?—that "fondness for animals" should instantly call up the association of "good shooting." No, I keep that little

stretch of woodland unreclaimed because I think it makes an effective contrast to the trimness of the garden. As for shooting—I have a constitutional objection to taking life in any form. I don't think I ever wittingly killed a black-beetle. It is not humanity on my part. I am perfectly willing that other people should kill things for my comfort and advantage. But the mechanism of life is so wonderful that I shrink from stopping its action. To tread on a black-beetle would be to me like crushing a watch of complex and exquisite workmanship.

W. A. I don't think I ever kill anything that is not actively making itself objectionable to me. What little shooting I have done has been almost entirely unassociated with the taking of life—I have not even bagged a beater. But I should have fewer qualms about shooting than, for instance, about fox-hunting. I know there is a theory that the fox enjoys his little run with the hounds; but——

Mr. Gilbert. I should like to hear the fox on that point. The time will no doubt come when the "sport" of the present day will be regarded very much as we regard the Spanish bull-fight, or the bear-baiting of our ancestors.

W. A. Your sympathies, then, were with Galatea when she called Leucippus a murderer for killing the fawn?

Mr. Gilbert. Not altogether. The term "murderer" implies a "guilty mind." Leucippus "never dreamt that he should hit her at so long a range." He shot idly, but "his aim was truer than he thought it was."

- W. A. You warned me that I might possibly be shocked by your views about the drama. Well, I have been bracing myself up all the way here. What are the heresies that are to take my breath away?
- Mr. Gilbert. Oh, "shocked" was too strong a word. Only I take it you are rather a believer in the "new drama" and in dramatic progress; whereas I am, naturally perhaps, inclined to be a bit of a laudator temporis acti. Understand me—I don't at all want to disparage the excellent work that is done now-a-days. Only I sometimes feel like entering a little protest against the unmeasured depreciation one sometimes hears of the plays which used to give one so much pleasure in the 'sixties and thereabouts. Oh yes—I know what you are going to say: they were often adaptations from the French—and even if they were not announced as such, you could never be quite sure
- W. A. And you don't think that a desirable state of things, do you?
- Mr. Gilbert. Morally, no—certainly not. When I was a youngster I translated (under compulsion) some of the tragedies of Æschylus, but I have never, on that account, claimed to be the author of the Seven against Thebes.
- W. A. But artistically you approve the old state of things?
- Mr. Gilbert. Well, there is no denying that a good French play—such a play as A Scrap of Paper—or a good English play on the French model—Tom Taylor's Unequal Match, for example—had a neatness, an ingenuity, a finish, that I miss in a great deal of latter-

day work. The modern playwright is rather apt to huddle up his action anyhow in his last act. He works up to his great effect in his third act (if it is a fouract play) and leaves his fourth act a sheer anticlimax, sometimes introducing a thinly-disguised deus ex machina to cut the knot. There is nothing easier than to write a good first act, and even the heightening of the complication in the second act is not very difficult. The dramatist's real problem is, and must always be, the solution in the last act. Now, in my time, a skilled playwright would usually begin by constructing his last act, and having that clear before him,—just as you set up a target before shooting at it. Doesn't that strike you as a rational proceeding?

W. A. In the abstract, no doubt; but does it not depend a little on the theme whether a play is capable of being brought to what you may call a conclusive conclusion? Where the action is not purely external, but depends on character or raises an ethical issue, it can rarely be rounded off quite satisfactorily, unless it is death that rings the curtain down.

Mr. Gilbert. What do you call a "purely external" action?

W. A. Well, for instance, one that turns on the finding or losing of a scrap of paper, or on the tracking of the thief who stole a document from a dispatch-box. In these plays of Sardou's—at any rate in their English dress—no question of character or conduct, of wisdom or unwisdom, of right or wrong, is raised for a moment. There is simply a puzzle to be solved, and the moment that is done the play is over. How seldom in real

life do happiness and misery turn upon such a simple problem as this!

Mr. Gilbert. True; but in real life no curtain descends to tell you that the story is at an end. In point of fact, in real life the story never does end. Certainly it never ends with a marriage. But in constructing a play I hold that you are not justified in interesting your audiences in the adventures of a group of personages, unless you are prepared to furnish those audiences with some information as to what becomes of that group.

W. A. Have you seen Mrs. Dane's Defence?

Mr. Gilbert. No; I was abroad while it was running.

W. A. Well, there Jones had a subject not quite unlike Sardou's in Diplomacy; but just because he put more humanity, more half-shades, more character into it, he could not finish it off with a mere discomfiture of the wicked woman. The audience would have rebelled, I am sure, if he had brought down his final curtain on the great scene of the third act. Felicia Hindmarsh was too human—in a sense, too sympathetic—to be simply sent packing out into the night without more ado. He had to write a fourth act, if only to attenuate in some degree the violent and painful effect of the third act. That is to say, art demanded an anti-climax.

Mr. Gilbert. I quite admit that there is respectable precedent for the anti-climax. Look at *The Merchant of Venice!* Look at *The School for Scandal!* Look at nearly every "classical" five-act comedy! The last act is, as a rule, merely perfunctory. But I don't think it ought to be. A good many recent plays, otherwise

of great ability, seem to me to come to a helpless, makeshift, essentially feeble end. I cannot think that that is sound art. I don't like to see a thing left at a loose end. I confess to a preference for finished form, even if the form, and perhaps the play itself, be borrowed from the French.

W. A. Perhaps I am a fanatic, a chauvinist; but I own I have a horror of adaptation. I think every country ought to hold its own mirror up to its own nature

Mr. Gilbert. You would rather have a bad English play than a good French one?

W. A. Not precisely that; but I would rather have no play at all than a French play tortured into an English dress. Not that I haven't taken great pleasure in many adaptations from the French, especially of farces, and what you may call fairy-tales. A pleasant fantasy in French may remain a pleasant fantasy in English, like your own Wedding March, for instance.

Mr. Gilbert. Now, there was a thing that simply flowed from its French into its English form. I had only to reduce it from five acts to three. How long do you think it took me to write that? Just a day and a half—and it brought me in £2500!

W. A. Under these circumstances, I can understand that adaptation has its charms. Grundy, too, has made a very fortunate dip into the Labiche lucky-bag in his *Pair of Spectacles*—a delightful play.

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, delightful,—and then he had the advantage of John Hare's exquisite, Meissonnier-like acting.

W. A. Of course, I am not so fanatical as to object to such plays as these. I think, if you will let me say so, you were better employed in writing Engaged and Tom Cobb than in adapting Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie; but, after all, the English drama could spare you for a day and a half.

Mr. Gilbert. But you must not speak as though all the plays of the period you look down upon were French, or even of the French school. There was nothing French about T. W. Robertson's best work, for instance; yet he managed to make it neat and finished, with effective last acts, and no loose ends hanging about.

W. A. You can always finish off a pure comedy neatly—with a marriage; just as you can finish off an out-and-out tragedy neatly—with a death or a general butchery. But the typical modern play sets forth to imitate life, in which pure comedies and out-and-out tragedies are the rarest things possible. As for Robertson, he was a very remarkable man, and his work was in some ways epoch-making; but don't you think most of it seems very slight and trivial now-a-days?

Mr. Gilbert. Robertson was an exceedingly skilful dramatic tailor. He knew the stage perfectly, and he knew perfectly the company he had to write for—the then Prince of Wales's stock company, which varied very little. He fitted each character with the utmost nicety to the man or woman who was to play it; and he was there to instruct them in every movement, every emphasis. But when these parts are transferred to other actors who knew not Robertson, the very nicety of their adjustment to their original performers

is apt to render them misfits. I think that accounts in great measure for the comparative ineffectiveness of his plays in revival—their charm was so largely dependent on Robertson's personal inspiration.

W. A. He was a great stage-manager, was he not?

Mr. Gilbert. A great stage-manager! Why, he invented stage-management. It was an unknown art before his time. Formerly, in a conversation scene for instance, you simply brought down two or three chairs from the flat and placed them in a row in the middle of the stage, and the people sat down and talked, and when the conversation was ended the chairs were replaced. Robertson showed how to give life and variety and nature to the scene, by breaking it up with all sorts of little incidents and delicate by-play. I have been at many of his rehearsals and learnt a great deal from them.

W. A. Still the fact remains that, though he invented an admirable mechanism for realistic drama, and pointed the way for the whole new movement, his plays themselves now seem exceedingly slight and empty.

Mr. Gilbert. Not Caste-surely you except Caste?

W. A. Yes, Caste is a fine play—all but the terrible Marquise and her Froissart. The last act is really great.

Mr. Gilbert. Robertson knew it was his masterpiece. I remember meeting him one day when he had just conceived the idea of the play, and was quite full of it. He poured forth the whole story to me as we walked along, and I told him how good I thought it. He was busy with something else at the moment, and could not settle down to write it; but he said to me, "I pant to begin that piece."

W. A. Poor fellow! What a pity success came to him so late, and death so early!

Mr. Gilbert. And then another thing that Robertson did-or, at least, that his comedies did-was to establish the system of touring companies. Personally, I lament the extinction of the stock companies, for they were a rough-and-ready school in which young actors learned their profession and justified their promotion to the London stage. A young member of one of the stock companies had, sometimes, to play a hundred and fifty parts in the course of a year. Now, a beginner is sent "on tour," and perhaps has to say, "My lord, the carriage waits" for a year and a half. He gains nothing by that, except his salary—and not always even that. Still, I think the touring system, though it has its drawbacks, has something to be said in its favour. For one thing, it has quite altered the status of the dramatist, by immensely enhancing the value of a successful play. What with provincial rights, American rights, and colonial rights, one or two successes now make a man practically independent, place him above the necessity of doing hack work like the adaptations you detest, and enable him to give time and thought to his art, and scope to his ambition.

W. A. Excuse my saying so, but, except on some purely technical points, I don't think you are a laudator temporis acti at all. On the contrary, I think you take a very liberal view of the theatrical situation.

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, I am far from denying that there

has been progress in many ways; and I admire as much as you can a great deal of the work of such a man as Pinero. Indeed, I know there has been progress, by a very convincing proof—namely, that I find myself left altogether behind.

W. A. Not left behind, surely,—your energies have been diverted into another channel than that of comedy and drama.

Mr. Gilbert. That is partly the fact; but it is true, none the less, that I have been left behind. On the one or two occasions when I have returned of late years to prose drama, I have found that the public did not care for my work. They were accustomed to something different, and no doubt something better. Most of my earlier work is forgotten by theatre-goers, who have learnt to look upon me simply as a writer of light libretti. They regard any attempt on my part to write seriously as they would regard an attempt on the part of Mr. Passmore to play Hamlet. It is convenient to "label" an author, and I am labelled "cynical librettist." Woe to me if I attempt to show that, in labelling me with so narrow a definition, audiences and critics are in error!

W. A. I wonder if you are not drawing too large a conclusion from one or two experiments? At any rate, I am sure that if you had stuck to the non-musical stage, the non-musical public would have stuck to you. But I do think—pardon the pertinacity of my optimism—that if you were now beginning your career, you would find the circumstances more propitious to serious work than you did in the 'sixties and 'seventies. It was you yourself—was it not?—who complained in

those days of the tyranny of "the young girl in the dress-circle." Well, the young girl in the dress-circle has—shall we say grown up?—in the past twenty years.

Mr. Gilbert. It is a mistake to suppose that I ever complained of the influence of the "young girl in the dress-circle." It is to her that I attribute the fact that most of the plays produced in the 'sixties and 'seventies were sweet and clean. I have always held that maxima reverentia is due to that young lady. I am so old-fashioned as to believe that the test whether a story is fit to be presented to an audience in which there are many young ladies, is whether the details of that story can be decently told at (say) a dinner-party at which a number of ladies and gentlemen are present. I put forward this suggestion with diffidence, for I am convinced that it will not be received with approval. Nevertheless, I have always kept this test well before me in writing plays, and I have never found myself inconveniently hampered by it.

W. A. Still, I shall always feel that, as regards serious drama, you were in advance of your time. Not that I pretend to regret it. Other people could write serious dramas; you alone could give us *Trial by Jury*, *Patience*, and *The Gondoliers*. Whether you admit the dramatic revival or not, you were one of the prime movers in it. You restored the literary self-respect of the English stage.

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, come! there was a great deal of admirable work done in extravaganza before my day.

W. A. Before it, yes; but in your day, so far as I know, you were alone in the power of giving literary

form to comic verse. It was not that the others—Farnie, Reece, even Byron—had less metrical skill than you had: practically, they had none at all. They could not write a tolerable verse to save their lives.

Mr. Gilbert. I cannot admit that this applies to Byron, who sometimes wrote excellent verse. Some of the burlesque writers of his day were not very strong in metrical form, I admit; but they made up for it by comic invention and inexhaustible, infectious high spirits. Look at Burnand, for instance—it was impossible to resist the effervescent drollery of his burlesques. Here, again, I think you critics of to-day are apt to speak with disproportionate contempt of an order of things which you saw, perhaps, only in its decadence. Not to speak of Planché, such men as Frank Talfourd, Albert Smith, and Robert Brough were extremely ingenious burlesque-writers.

W. A. Robert Brough? Was he "clean Brough" or "clever Brough"?

Mr. Gilbert. "Clever Brough," decidedly. His brother William was "clean Brough." And then think of the actors who used to appear in burlesque in those days! All the best comedians of the time—Charles Mathews, Buckstone, Compton, James Bland, John Clarke, James Rogers, Marie Wilton, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews, Alfred Wigan, Patty Oliver, Robson, and many others.

W. A. It would be absurd to imagine, of course, that any form of entertainment that was so popular as mid-century burlesque could be entirely without merit. I know that Planché wrote gracefully enough. Some of his extravaganzas "let themselves be read" even

now with pleasure. You are right, too, in suggesting that my horror of burlesque arises mainly from the monstrosities of its decadence—the "three-act burlesque dramas" that made the Gaiety lugubrious in the days of the "sacred lamp." But nothing you can say in praise of your predecessors alters the fact that your Opera Comique and Savoy extravaganzas did us three great services: they substituted original invention for parody, for the wanton degradation and vulgarisation of historic or legendary themes; they set up a very high standard of versification in the lyric numbers; and they substituted polished prose for the doggerel dialogue of the old burlesques, bristling with idiotic puns.

Mr. Gilbert. There again, are you not a little intolerant? Surely there are puns and puns, and a good pun is no such bad thing. There was often an exquisite neatness in the puns of Albert Smith, of Talfourd, of Brough. I remember one of Albert Smith's for instance; where Orson, the foster-son of a she-bear, you know, is mourning the decease of his foster-mother, he says something to this effect:

Behold me strewin'
With leaves this little bier of my own bruin.

That's what I call a perfect play upon words. Then, again, in Planché's *Invisible Prince* the hero, Don Leander, recalling the incidents of his boyhood, says:

Here, in frolic mood, at evening's close, With a new top I pegged my tutor's toes. The dear old quiz! Ah, I remember well It was not on my top his vengeance fell! Again, in his interview with the fairy Gentilla, Leander says:

Though an elf,

I still shall have a body like myself?

: Oh, certainly, for though you need not fetter Yourself to that, you couldn't get a better.

LEANDER: A finer compliment was never uttered!

FAIRY: You're so well bred, you ought to be well buttered.

These, taken at random, seem to me to be perfect in their way.

W. A. Oh, yes; Planché had a very delicate art in word-plays; and by dint of perpetually punning—seizing upon every possible jingle that came in their way—his successors contrived now and then to hit on something really clever. But, as a rule, does it not strike terror to your heart to look at a page of an old burlesque, with its violent eruption of italics, forcing the puns upon the reader's notice? For example:

I must bid Ganymede to earth to fly—Ganymede brin-g an immede-iate supply. Nectar celestial drink 's supposed to be, It 's called divine—this is de vine for me.

That is a very favourable specimen of Byron's style.

Mr. Gilbert. Byron could do much better than that. But I suppose the punning burlesque became decrepit in its old age, as every literary form must, sooner or later.

W. A. You gave it its quietus with a bare bodkin—of wit. And you performed that service, thank goodness! not only to burlesque, but to French operabouffe.

- Mr. Gilbert. Without going into the question how far that is true—it is certainly a very sweeping statement of the case—I cannot but ask your optimism whether it regards the "musical comedies" of to-day as a great improvement either on the "three-act burlesque drama," or on the French opera-bouffe, whose death you are good enough to lay at my door. There is a parable—is there not?—about an evil spirit which, being cast out, returned with seven other spirits more wicked than himself.
- W. A. Assuredly I am no devotee of "musical comedy." As for comparing it to French opera-bouffe in French, that would be wildly absurd. The operettas of Meilhac and Halévy are marvels of wit and vivacity; but think of French wit and vivacity filtered through the medium of Mr. H. B. Farnie! These things are utterly untranslatable—they become at best like uncorked champagne, at worst like champagne spilt in the gutter. Better The Belle of New York, any day, than Meilhac and Halévy rewritten by Reece and Farnie. Not long ago I came across your own translation of Les Brigands—excellently done, of course, but how flat in comparison with your original work!
- Mr. Gilbert. That was my one experiment in operabouffe, and it was a purely perfunctory translation to secure copyright. It was never intended for the stage, although, by an oversight in my agreement, it found its way there twenty-five years after it was written.
- W. A. Then, comparing the modern "musical comedy" with the old burlesque, you must admit that there is one point in which it has a marked superiority—again thanks to you. The men who contribute the

verses to our "musical comedies" have never fallen quite away from the standard of versification which you set up. Their lyrics are very different from the awful doggerel of the old burlesques and of the worser sort of opera-bouffe adaptations.

Mr. Gilbert. There I quite agree with you. In general, the versification of these pieces is excellent. Mr. Adrian Ross, for example, is a most ingenious rhymer—so are Captain Basil Hood and several other writers of light verse. These two gentlemen have, moreover, a cultivated ear for rhythm. The fact is that in their librettos, as in mine, the natural order of things is followed—the librettist provides the verses for the musician, instead of having to adapt his words and his rhythms to music already written by Offenbach or Lecocq.

W. A. I should think it is very seldom that an air originally written to French words can be fitted with English words that run in any recognised English measure—the metrical systems of the two languages are so utterly different.

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, no—you can very often set a quite regular English stanza to a French air. The first verses of mine I ever saw in print were a version of a French laughing-song from Manon Lescaut, which I did when I was eighteen at the request of Madame Parepa, who was then singing at Mellon's Promenade Concerts. She had the translation printed on the concert-programme, and I can perfectly remember standing in the "promenade," or pit, and seeing a man reading the verses as Parepa sang them. "Ha!" I thought, "if he knew that the person standing at his elbow was the

writer of these lines, how thrilled he would be!" My subsequent experience teaches me that he would have received the information with fortitude. The thing was a laughing-song, and went like this:

An entertaining story,
A fiction amatory,
About a legal star,
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!
A legal dignitary
Particularly wary,
A member of the bar,
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

and so on. The French original ran thus:

C'est l'histoire amoureuse,
Autant que fabuleuse,
D'un ancien fier-à-bras,
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!
D'un tendre commissaire
Que l'on disait sévère,
Et qui ne l'était pas,
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

You see the English is in strict metrical form, yet exactly reproduces the rhythm of the French. I afterwards used the same words in my "respectful perversion" of Tennyson's *Princess*.

W. A. Now, tell me—if you don't mind—did you invent all the inexhaustible variety of rhythms in your operas, or did the suggestion for any of them come from Sullivan? I mean, did he ever say to you, "I have an idea for a song in something like this measure,"—and hum a stave to you?

Mr. Gilbert. No, never. The verse always preceded the music, or even any hint of it. Sometimes—very rarely—Sullivan would say of some song I had given him, "My dear fellow, I can't make anything of this"—and then I would rewrite it entirely—never tinker at it. But of course I don't mean to say that I "invented" all the rhythms and stanzas in the operas. Often a rhythm would be suggested by some old tune or other running in my head, and I would fit my words to it more or less exactly. When Sullivan knew I had done so, he would say, "Don't tell me what the tune is, or I shan't be able to get it out of my head." But once, I remember, I did tell him. There is a duet in The Yeomen of the Guard, beginning:

I have a song to sing, O! Sing me your song, O!

It was suggested to me by an old chantey I used to hear the sailors on board my yacht singing in the "dog watch" on Saturday evenings, beginning:

Come, and I will sing you— What will you sing me? I will sing you one, O! What is your one, O?

and so on. Well, when I gave Sullivan the words of the duet he found the utmost difficulty in setting it. He tried hard for a fortnight, but in vain. I offered to recast it in another mould, but he expressed himself so delighted with it in its then form that he was determined to work it out to a satisfactory issue. At last he came to me and said: "You often have some old air in your mind which prompts the metre of your songs: if anything prompted you in this case, hum it to me—it may help me." Only a rash man ever asks

me to hum, but the situation was desperate, and I did my best to convey to him the air of the chantey that had suggested the song to me. I was so far successful that before I had hummed a dozen bars he exclaimed, "That will do—I've got it!" And in an hour he produced the charming air as it appears in the opera. I have sometimes thought that he exclaimed, "That will do—I've got it," because my humming was more than he could bear; but he always assured me that it had given him the necessary clue to the proper setting of the song.

W. A. What a curious thing the chantey must be! Do you remember more of it?

Mr. Gilbert. I remember it all, as my sailors used to sing it. I found out afterwards that it was a very much corrupted form of an old Cornish carol. This was their version of it:

FIRST VOICE: Come, and I will sing you—
ALL: What will you sing me?
FIRST VOICE: I will sing you one, O!

ALL: What is your one, O? FIRST VOICE: One of them is all alone,

And ever will remain so.

ALL: One of them, etc.

SECOND VOICE: Come, and I will sing you—
ALL: What will you sing me?

SECOND VOICE: I will sing you two, O!

ALL: What is your two, O?

SECOND VOICE: Two of them are lilywhite maids Dressed all in green, O!

ALL: One of them is all alone,

And ever will remain so.
THIRD VOICE: Come, and I will sing you—

ALL: What will you sing me?

THIRD VOICE: I will sing you three, O!

ALL: What is your three, O? THIRD VOICE . Three of them are strangers.

ALL: Two of them are lilywhite maids,

> Dressed all in green, O! One of then is all alone,

And ever will remain so!

And so on until twelve is reached.

THIRD VOICE: Come, and I will sing you-

ALL: What will you sing me?

THIRD VOICE . I will sing you twelve, O!

ALL: What is your twelve, O?

THIRD VOICE: Twelve are the twelve apostles, ALL:

Eleven of them have gone to heaven. Ten are the Ten Commandments.

Nine is the moonlight bright and clear,

Eight are the eight archangels,

Seven are the seven stars in the sky,

Six are the cheerful waiters (!)

Five are the ferrymen in the boats, Four are the gospel preachers,

Three of them are strangers, Two of them are lilywhite maids,

Dressed all in green, O! One of them is all alone.

And ever will remain so!

W. A. That is one of the quaintest chanteys I ever came across. I gather, then, from your having been able to convey the air to Sullivan, that you are not so devoid of musical faculty as many masters of rhythm have been-Tennyson, for instance, and Victor Hugo?

Mr. Gilbert. It's true, of course, that rhythm is one thing, and tune another-and harmony a third. I suppose I may claim a fairly accurate ear for rhythm, but I have little or no ear for tune.

W. A. But you are not, like Dr. Johnson or Charles

Lamb, incapable of distinguishing one tune from another—or like Dean Stanley (was it not?), who took off his hat when the band played "Rule Britannia," under the impression that it was "God Save the Queen"?

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, no, I am not so bad as that. On the contrary, I am very fond of music up to a certain point. I care more for the song than for the singerfor the melody than for the execution. I would rather hear Annie Laurie sung with feeling, than the greatest singer in the world declaiming a scene from Tristan und Isolde. I used to be exceedingly fond of the light French and Italian operas that were popular in my youth and that are never heard now-Don Pasquale, Fra Diavolo, La Sonnambula, La Figlia del Reggimento, and L'Elisir d'Amore. I believe they might be popular again if they were neatly translated and well done. Indeed, I have often suggested this to Carte and Mrs. Carte, and they seriously considered the idea. But they had not been familiar with this class of opera as I had been, and the project always remained in the air.

W. A. I remember, on the only occasion when I ever met Sir Arthur Sullivan, he told me he suspected you of having more taste for music than you cared to admit. He said you would sometimes, at rehearsal, have a number repeated on the plea that the action or grouping was not quite perfect, when he believed in reality you simply wanted to hear it again, for the pleasure of the thing. Do you plead guilty to such tenebrous courses?

Mr. Gilbert. I plead guilty, at any rate, to having taken the keenest pleasure in familiarising myself with

Sullivan's work—not merely the airs that everybody knows, but hundreds of details that I dare say escape general observation. He would often throw into brilliant relief the most unexpected things—"furniture lines," as we called them—phrases belonging to the mere mechanism of the story. And then his orchestration was so ingenious and admirable! When we first began to work together, and he brought down to rehearsal the mere piano score of a number, I would sometimes think, "Hallo! this is very thin! I'm afraid this won't do!" But when I heard it with the orchestral colouring added, it was a totally different affair. I very soon learned to distrust my first impressions of a number, apart from the orchestra.

W. A. What happy chance was it that first brought you into connection with Sullivan?

Mr. Gilbert. Well, oddly enough, on our very first meeting I posed him with a musical problem. It was at the old "Gallery of Illustration," then occupied by the German Reeds, for whom I had written several short pieces. Frederick Clay introduced me to Sullivan, and I determined to play off upon him a piece of musical clap-trap which I happened to have in my mind. I had just completed a three-act blank-verse play called The Palace of Truth, for the Haymarket Theatre. One of the characters in that play is a musical pedant, and it occurred to me to convert one of his speeches into prose and to try its effect on Sullivan. So I said to him: "I'm very glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Sullivan, for you will be able to decide a question which has just arisen between my friend Fred Clay and myself. I maintain

that, if a composer has a musical theme to express, he can express it as perfectly upon the simple tetrachord of Mercury, in which (as I need not tell you) there are no diatonic intervals at all, as upon the much more complicated dis-diapason (with the four tetrachords and the redundant note), which embraces in its perfect consonance all the simple, double, and inverted chords." Sullivan appeared to be impressed by the question, which, he said, he could not answer off-hand. He said he would take it away and think it over. must have thought it over for about thirty years, for I never received an answer to the question. I obtained my musical facts from the Encyclopædia Britannica, under the head "Harmony." I took a sentence and put it into blank verse without any idea as to what it may have meant.

W. A. The stage work at the Savoy was entirely in your hands, I suppose?

Mr. Gilbert. Oh yes, and very smooth and pleasant work it always was. Of course I planned out the whole stage-management beforehand, on my model stage, with blocks three inches high to represent men, and two and a half inches high to represent women. I knew exactly what groupings I wanted—how many people I could have on this bank, how many on that rostrum, and so forth. I had it all clear in my head before going down to the theatre; and there the actors and actresses were good enough to believe in me and to lend themselves heartily to all I required of them. You see I had the exact measure of their capabilities, and took good care that the work I gave them should be well within their grasp. The result was that I never

had a moment's difficulty with any actor or actress in the Savoy Theatre. I have sometimes had a piece perfect, so far as stage-management was concerned, in four rehearsals. I don't mean, of course, that it was ready for presentation to the public, but that the company were thoroughly at home in their positions and stage-business.

W. A. Happy the author who can so perfectly convey his ideas to his actors! And the result was an absolute smoothness and finish of representation, which people came to demand in other theatres as well. That was not the least of the benefits conferred on the English stage by Savoy extravaganza.

Mr. Gilbert. The author who cannot be his own stagemanager is certainly at a serious disadvantage. His stage-management, as I said, was half the secret of Robertson's success; and Pinero, too, is an admirable stage-manager. But however well an author may convey his ideas, I think critics are too apt to forget that what they see never wholly represents the author's intention. They are not careful enough to allow for the distorting, prismatic medium of stage presentation. I am not speaking of my own pieces—I believe I have suffered less in this way than most people, and may often have been praised for what was really the merit of the actor. But the general tendency of criticism is the other way-to saddle the author with the entire responsibility for whatever seems wrong, and to give the actor the whole credit for whatever seems right.

W. A. No doubt it is one of the great difficulties of criticism to see the play through the actor and the actor through the play—a difficulty which can at best

be only partially overcome. But the sins of dramatic criticism are an interminable subject of discussion, and I have taken up too much of your time already.

Mr. Gilbert. Oh, I am not working at anything just now—and in any case, except under the severest pressure, I never work in the afternoon.

W. A. What is your working-time of the day?

Mr. Gilbert. Well, it used to be, I'm afraid, the small hours of the night. I found I could never work better than between eleven and three in the morning. Then you have absolute peace—the postman has done his worst, and no one can interrupt you, unless it be a burglar.—But perhaps you are right—we have spent long enough indoors this lovely afternoon. Will you have a look round the garden, and help me to feed my trout?

W. A. With pleasure.

Exeunt into the sunshine.

July, 1901.

Conversation VII. With Professor Masson.

The dramatic form of these Conversations precludes anything like personal portraiture; yet I am tempted, on this occasion only, to step before the curtain and direct the reader's attention to the remarkable personality of my interlocutor. Scotchmen are not apt to be ashamed of their nationality, but, for my part, I never felt prouder of it than after my visit to Professor David Masson. On the threshold of his eightieth year, he remains a perfect type of the intellectual vigour, the "high seriousness" (by no means incompatible with humour), the width of outlook, the liberality of thought, characteristic of the best men of his race and generation. Age has not deadened in him a single interest, nor chilled a single sympathy. Listening to his alert and picturesque talk (feebly enough mirrored in the following pages), one found it scarcely credible that he should remember the French Revolution of '48, not as a vague rumour of his childhood, but as an epoch-making event of his maturity. He was twenty-six when it occurred; seven years later he became Professor of English Literature in University College, London; and five years later again he was the first editor of the first of the modern shilling magazines-" Macmillan's"-leading the way which Thackeray was soon afterwards to follow in the "Cornhill." His literary labours need no recapitulation -his "Life of Milton," a monument of British scholarship, his vivid reconstruction of the tragedy of Chatterton, his study of Drummond of Hawthornden, his essay on the "Three Devils" (Luther's, Milton's, and Goethe's), his edition of De Quincey, and innumerable other contributions to literature and philosophy. But thousands of his countrumen throughout the world owe even more to his oral teaching, stimulation, inspiration, than to the lessons of his books. One of the most distinguished of his students, J. M. Barrie, has paid him a well-deserved tribute in his " Edinburgh Eleven." "If, as I take it," said Mr. Barrie, "the glory of a professor is to give elastic minds their proper bent, Masson is a name his country will retain a grip of." The striking resemblance between Professor Masson and his friend Thomas Carlyle has been noted again and again-by Mr. Barrie among others. But though there is something of the same ruggedness, the same underlying melancholy in the two faces. Professor Masson's is lighted up by a kindliness, a spontaneous humanity, which must often have been lacking in Carlyle's physiognomy. "Dourness" is the one national characteristic in which Professor Masson is lacking. There are very few of his pupils, I venture to say, who do not share in that singular blending of affection with respect which speaks in Mr. Barrie's sketch of him.

Scene: Edinburgh: Professor Masson's study.

Time: An autumn afternoon.

Professor Masson. I hope you had no difficulty in finding your way here. We have only lately been included within the city boundaries. Till a little while ago, we were supposed to be "in the country."

W. A. Well, practically you are in the country: that romantic wooded hill, and the little loch below, with the white sails on it!

Professor Masson. And the Pentlands beyond.

W. A. Edinburgh has certainly grown out of all knowledge since the days when I was an idle student in your class, Professor Masson.

Professor Masson. Oh, I remember you very well. I remember where you used to sit—at the top left-hand corner of the lecture-room.

W. A. I trust it was not my misconduct—but I fear it can scarcely have been my diligence—that impressed itself on your memory. Still (though to some extent I "sinned my mercies"), as a pupil of yours, I could not refrain from putting in my word in the ridiculous controversy that cropped up again the other day, as to whether literature can be taught.

Professor Masson. I had not heard of the discussion till you sent me your article. Perhaps I am not an impartial judge in the matter, for I am naturally somewhat loath to believe that forty-three years of my life have been devoted to an impossibility. But indeed I see no very cogent reason for believing so. It is true, of course, that you cannot put brains into a born blockhead, or teach perception where no perceptive faculty exists. But if that be an argument against the teaching of English literature, it is no less an argument against all teaching whatsoever. Though you cannot give a lad brains, you can help him-in the study of English literature, as in any other study—to use what brains he has. You can awaken and stimulate his interest in the great procession of genius that constitutes our literary history. Though you cannot implant taste where it does not exist, you can train it where, as in the immense majority of cases, the elements of it are present. Taste in literature is not a thing granted

in perfection, or absolutely denied, by a special decree of heaven. It can be formed and cultivated, just like a taste in (say) tobacco. If a man never smokes anything but bad cigars, he will never have any discrimination. But once let him smoke five or six good cigars—I hope that one, by the way, is to your taste—and he will know good from bad for the rest of his days. It is the teacher's business to place some of the select cigars of literature before his pupil; and either the teacher must be very uninspiring, or the pupil very dense, if their aroma does not haunt him for ever after, and render him proof against the pretensions of the cabbage-leaf of commerce.

W. A. It is fortunate—though Ruskin, if I remember rightly, used to deplore the fact—that the book-seller's Havanahs are not as costly, in proportion, as the tobacconist's.

Professor Masson. And surely it is the same with pictures. If you want to form your taste for painting, you study, under expert guidance, a number of masterpieces, and learn what the painters have done, and what left undone, to command the admiration of the world.

W. A. Then again—if I may be allowed to say so—the instruction in rhetoric and composition that was included in your course was simply invaluable. You cannot teach a man to write like Sir Thomas Browne, any more than you can teach him to compose like Beethoven. He must have the music of words in his soul, no less than the music of tone. But such teaching as yours, besides helping us to appreciate the prose of the masters, put us on our guard against many of the

pitfalls, the current illogicalities and obscurities, of English writing. It enabled us, when we had anything to say, to say that and not something different. Many lads go up to the English universities—ay, and come down from them too—very fair classical scholars, but unable to write their own language with reasonable force and precision.

Professor Masson. Yes, I think the Scottish system of teaching English literature has a good deal to be said for it. Yet you find people in England discussing whether, and how, literature should be taught, in apparent ignorance of the fact that we in Scotland have something like a century and a half of experience on these points to come and go upon.

W. A. In America, too, they don't stop to argue whether instruction in English literature is advisable. In all their great colleges there are schools of English language and literature, with a numerous and enthusiastic teaching staff.

Professor Masson. Talking of that, I was glad to see you, the other day, standing up for the right of America to contribute new words and phrases to the language, if only they prove themselves good and useful contributions.

W. A. If they prove themselves fitted to survive, in short.

Professor Masson. Just so. Every new word—and, for that matter, every old word as well—is of course on probation. If, and while, it supplies a want, it lives; when it no longer supplies a want, it dies. And in the living language of a living people, new conditions will always be begetting new wants. It is difficult to

understand the state of mind of a man who insists on treating a living language as a dead one, incapable of growth, of expansion. When, for instance, an eminent public man lately, condemning the verbal vagaries of some writers, said that, as for himself, he was "content with the English language," or words to that effect, what was his exact meaning? There has been, one may say, a succession of English languages, each of which has put off old words and put on new. Not to go back so far as to Langland or Chaucer, take the language of Shakespeare, so marvellously, so incomparably, rich in its vocabulary. If a writer now tried to express himself, on any topic of modern life, in the vocabulary of Shakespeare, he would find even that unique vocabulary run hopelessly short before he had written ten sentences.

W. A. And, on the other hand, there are countless words in Shakespeare which no writer could use to-day, at any rate in prose, without palpable and painful affectation.

Professor Masson. Then, again, imagine Shakespeare now alive, and attempting to read an English author of the nineteenth century. Take, for instance, one who cannot be accused of using eccentric or far-fetched terms—Macaulay. Shakespeare could not read a page or two of Macaulay's Essays without coming across words and phrases that would stagger him—over each of which he would have to pause for five or ten minutes before he could divine its meaning—so many objects, notions, and social customs that did not exist in Shakespeare's lifetime having come into being since, and been provided, necessarily, with names and verbal com-

binations enabling them to be talked of and written about familiarly. Each of the nouns and verbs unknown to Shakespeare must have been at one time or another a neologism. If, as each presented itself, purists had risen up against it, declared themselves "content with the English language," and scourged it out of the sacred confine, the English language would presently have become incapable of expressing the thoughts, or even transacting the daily business, of the nation. It is absurd to say to the rising tide of language, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further." Of course every one who writes or speaks English can, in a greater or less degree, influence the obscure process by which the ultimate acceptance or rejection of a new word is determined. But to set your face indiscriminately against all neologism is merely to renounce your right of influencing, however infinitesimally, the language of the future. For the language of the future will certainly not be the language of the present, or of any arbitrary date at which you have made up your mind that the power of assimilation, which has made English what it is, ought to cease and determine. The English language of next week will not be absolutely the same as the English language of this week.

W. A. I wonder whether this habit of regarding English as something rigid and inexpansive does not proceed partly from the habit of composing in the dead languages, in which no word must be used that cannot cite its definite credentials. But Cicero himself could scarcely write, say, a treatise on bimetallism, or a philippic against Mr. Cecil Rhodes, without enlarging the scope of Ciceronian Latin.

Professor Masson. There is an old story of a Glasgow man who was so impressed by the prodigious copiousness and rapidity of Lord Jeffrey's utterance in one of his great speeches at the Bar, that he exclaimed at the close of it, "Mercy on us! that man has spoken the English language twice over in three hours." But the English language is not so easily exhausted. This illusion of finality in language takes another form in the attacks one sometimes sees in Scottish periodicals upon the dialect of the so-called "Kailyard School" of Scottish novelists-Barrie, Ian Maclaren, Crockett, and the rest. I have seen it denounced as "mongrel Scotch," "factitious Scotch," and so forth. Now that is very There has never been a fixed, cast-iron Scotch, any more than an unalterable English. The Scottish language and the provincial dialects of English have been subject, and are still subject, to laws of progressive internal change, similar to those that have affected, and still affect, the standard English. The Scotch of Barbour is not that of Sir David Lindsay; the Scotch of Sir David Lindsay is not that of Allan Ramsay (which may be called a sort of eclectic Scotch for literary use in Edinburgh in the early part of the eighteenth century); nor is the Scotch of Allan Ramsay exactly that of Burns. Sir Walter's also was, in a certain sense, eclectic-not that of any one shire or strath. You can seldom tell from the language of his characters what Lowland district they are supposed to belong to. Barrie, on the other hand, reproduces faithfully (within the limits of art) the dialect of his own countryside.

W. A. May it not be that the critics obscurely feel the dialect of the present day to be too much debased for use in literature, and abuse the authors for doing badly what in reality they do only too well?

Professor Masson. It is true, no doubt, that a dialect so situated as the old Scottish vernacular has been during the past century, necessarily approximates more and more towards the language of what Lord Rosebery calls the "predominant partner."

W. A. And consequently becomes less and less worthy of preservation in literature?

Professor Masson. I don't know that. It doubtless becomes less interesting to the philologist, but not necessarily less valuable to the artist. If a novelist is going faithfully to depict a certain class of people, he must evidently make them talk in their characteristic idiom, regardless of its philological interest. If the people are worth depicting, their dialect must at least be accepted as a necessary means to that end. It is true, there are some books that exist solely for the sake of their dialect, and have no worth that does not reside in that. But no one can say that Barrie's belong to this class.

W. A. Certainly not I. He seems to me one of the most authentic men of genius we have. As to Scotch, is it not the case that while the accent and intonation remain inveterate, the vocabulary, in the towns at least, has almost died out? Not long ago, I had occasion to listen for some time to the conversation of a number of Innerleithen mill-hands. Their pronunciation was so broad that an Englishman would probably not have understood them; but they used very few Scotch words, and their talk was full of the latest London music-hall slang. Their vocabulary seemed to proceed mainly

from Spicy Scraps, Snappy Bits, and suchlike wells of English undefiled. On the other hand, I was very much struck, in cycling across the Border a few years ago, with the suddenness of the plunge into the very broadest Scotch, without the smallest natural frontier to account for the cleavage of the dialects. Something went amiss with my cycle just as I reached the Border, and I asked the first person I saw-a man breaking stones on the road—the way to the famous blacksmith's at Gretna Green. His reply was, "Ye'll jist hae to turrn fornent the toon." You could scarcely have broader Doric than that-"fornent" for "opposite," and "toon" in the sense, not of town, but of farmstead. Yet, a mile back on the level road, the natives spoke Cumbrian English, indeed, but English none the less.

Professor Masson. That was not Hugh Miller's experience the first time he crossed the Border, the other way. You remember how he looked out in vain for some sign, in nature or in man, that he had passed into a new country. For a long time he could discover no such sign; until the coach on which he was travelling had to change horses somewhere or other. As the coachman was ready to start afresh, he shouted to the guard, "All right, Bill?" and the guard replied, "Right as the Church of England!" Then, and not till then, Miller realised that he had left Scotland behind. Yet he was a man whom "Englishry" of speech would be likely to strike forcibly, for his own Cromarty Scotch was peculiar. He would talk, for instance-I exaggerate a little, perhaps, but not seriously-of "the butter kip of affluction."

W. A. (after a pause). I give it up. "Affliction" I recognise, but what is the "butter kip"?

Professor Masson. Why, the "bitter cup." No doubt I do his dialect a certain injustice, for, being an Aberdeenshire man, I am more at home in the Aberdeenshire dialect, with its peculiarities of "f" for "wh" and "ee" for "oo"—for example, "Fat are ye deein?" for "What are you doing?" Do you know our local classic, Alexander's Johnny Gibb o' Gushetneuk?

W. A. I'm afraid I don't.

Professor Masson. Mr. Gladstone used to take great pleasure in it; but its dialect would be a stumbling-block even to most Scotsmen. Hugh Miller, of course, though he could talk in broad Scotch, wrote excellent and classical English. I always think his My Schools and Schoolmasters one of those books that there ought to be an Act of Parliament to compel all young men to read.

W. A. I am afraid it is a good deal neglected in these days. And that reminds me, Professor Masson, of a point I wanted to suggest to you. Your memory goes back to the middle years of last century. You saw, if not the rise, at any rate the culmination of all the great writers of the Victorian Age. Do you think it is true that the men of to-day are comparatively a puny folk?—that in the field of literature, at any rate, there is a notable lack of such commanding individualities as made, say, the 'fifties and 'sixties illustrious?

Professor Masson. Well, that is a point on which the probability of illusion is so great that one has to speak very cautiously. Every age has been inclined to look back on a previous age, and say, "There were giants in those days."

W. A. But you, who have rubbed shoulders with the giants of the past half-century-can you look around now, and point to any considerable number of men who have either reached, or given definite promise of reaching, an intellectual or artistic stature at all comparable with that of Carlyle, Ruskin, Darwin, Mill, Tennyson, Browning, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot? Of course I "bar" Meredith, Herbert Spencer, and Swinburne, the great bulk, at any rate, of whose life-work lies in the bygone period. Or, to look at it from another point of view: in all the huge output of books of to-day, how many are there for which you could at all confidently predict even the lease of life which the works of those writers and of lesser writers than they, have already enjoyed, to say nothing of the future that may yet be in store for them?

Professor Masson. It is true, I think, that the conditions of modern life are apt to be unfavourable to the abstraction and concentration necessary for the greatest kind of work. There was more leisure in my young days-the railway and the electric telegraph had not yet taken such tyrannous hold of us. As I see the young men of to-day going on their way through life, it seems to me that few of them pause to look up at the stars; more of them are intent on looking horizontally before them-or downwards. The average of accomplishment, I should say, has improved; but men go about their work now in a different spirit. Among the best of the young men of my time the actual nous was as good as in the best of the young men of to-day, and they were able to give it a better chance. They had far more of solitude, far less of compulsory or prescribed

occupation, far more of passive contemplation, letting their spirits lie open to all the winds that blew. And so pretty well on into manhood. Think of Tennyson, and all the years that he went mooning things over in his own mind, and humming them to his own ear, between the publication of his early, unripe work and that of the work that took the world by storm! In those days, when a subject struck a man, he did not dash at his desk at once—he rolled the thing over and over in his mind first, and got into complete affinity with it——

W. A. (interrupting). Whereas, now, the moment an idea strikes him, he (or his agent) sends a paragraph to the literary papers to announce the momentous fact. And then he proceeds to dictate the great work to a type-writer at the rate of so many thousand words a day.

Professor Masson. Formerly, too, when a man had written his book, he put the manuscript under his arm and went off with it to a publisher, to take his chance. Now-a-days it is, as often as not, the publisher that has originated the idea and commissioned the book. Look at the innumerable "series," for example—many of them capitally conceived, most useful, excellent—but necessarily involving some restriction upon the individuality of each contributor. He has to fall into line—to write to a pattern—at the very least, to confine himself within a fixed limit of space.

W. A. One can scarcely imagine Carlyle contributing to a series.

Professor Masson. And this new relation expresses itself in the very wording of the literary announcements. We are told that Mr. Smith or Messrs, Brown

(the publishers) "will give us," on such and such a date, Mr. So-and-So's new novel or volume of essays; as though our gratitude for the benefaction of literature were due primarily to Tonson, not to Dryden, to Constable, not to Scott.

W. A. I believe many a promising talent is killed by the literary papers. Some years ago, for instance, I knew a young man of considerable ability who made some trifling success, while still an undergraduate, with a novelette or a book of poems. He was "taken up" by an enthusiastic publisher, and from that moment vou could scarcely open a literary paper without finding the movements, achievements, projects, contracts, inspirations of Mr. M. N. chronicled in full. What chance was there, under such circumstances, for the "abstraction and concentration" you speak of? What could be the effect of all this puffing and paragraphing, except to beget in the young man, if not inordinate vanity, at any rate morbid and distracting self-consciousness? Of late the flow of paragraphs seems to have ceased, and I dare say we may look for some really solid work from Mr. M. N., who, I believe, is quite capable of it. But the incessant publicity, of which this is an instance, is certainly not conducive to high inspiration.

Professor Masson. No, it is not. As I said before, solitude seems to be impossible in the modern world. In the older, more leisurely time, men were more concerned with what may be called elemental notions. The bigger facts and forces in nature and in the soul came more intimately home to them. They saw their kind in larger relations to each other, and in con-

junctures that begot the larger passions. In the stir and bustle of modern life, where one sensation crowds upon another, it is the ephemeral things that interest men. I remember once being with Tennyson at Norman Lockyer's house, then near Finchley Road, where he had his own telescope at work in the back garden. There was much interest at that time in the resolution of the nebulæ, and we were all looking in turn through Lockyer's telescope, at that particular nebula then most in favour for the purpose. Tennyson. after gazing intently at it for a long time, turned away from the telescope, and said to the one or two of us that were nearest to him, "I don't know what one can say about the county families after that." Yet the county families keep well in the foreground of men's thoughts, and literature finds a good deal to say of them.

W. A. Well, even the county families were no bad theme in the hands of Shakespeare and Scott and Thackeray.

Professor Masson. Oh, I don't mean to imply that the weakness of modern literature—if weakness there be—lies in its choice of subjects.

W. A. May we not say, to put the matter briefly, that literature as a whole tends more and more to the condition of journalism, in being deliberately calculated to meet a large but ephemeral demand?

Professor Masson. Ah! journalism!—what a power that is! How can literature be quite what it was, with the vast profession of journalism, day by day, week by week, month by month, drawing off so much and so remarkable talent? Think what wonderful

matter there is in our daily papers! I have not the least doubt that there appears every day, in anonymous leading articles, writing superior, not only in tone, but in actual literary faculty, to the Letters of Junius. When I was a young man, journalism, as we know it to-day, practically did not exist. Now that perishable work brings not only a quicker but a larger reward than permanent work, what wonder if the quantity of permanent work should decline? How few have the means, the character, the patience, to devote themselves to graving in bronze, when jottings in wax are so much more in demand?

W. A. And by jottings in wax you don't, I take it, mean only writings in obviously ephemeral form? We must include in journalism, I think, the great majority even of the books "bound and lettered on the back" (as Charles Lamb put it) that jostle one another on Mudie's counter. They are, in nine cases out of ten, put forth with no design or hope of attaining a longer life than that of a monthly review, or at the outside a quarterly. If we could get at statistics of the average longevity even of successful books, I fancy we should find it very much less than the average longevity of books of similar status fifty years ago.

Professor Masson. The competition, you see, has so immensely increased. Look at fiction, for instance. At present, I believe, there are about five novels published every day in Great Britain; whereas at about the middle of the Waverley period the output of novels was only twenty-five in the year. By the end of Scott's life it had risen, I think, to a hundred. Consider, then, what chance there is that any novel

will deeply and permanently impress itself on the imagination of the public, when it finds as many competitors within one week as *Ivanhoe*, let us say, found in a year.

W. A. All these causes, however—the whirl of life, the distractions of journalism, and so forth—are surely too external, too superficial, to account for the lack of commanding individualities in the literary world of to-day. Assuming the phenomenon to be real, and not illusory, I think we must look for some deeper, more compulsive, cause for it. Is there not something in the philosophic, the spiritual atmosphere of the day which prevents great talents—they are by no means lacking—from developing into great characters?

Professor Masson. I very well remember, my dear Mr. Archer, walking down the Strand one afternoon in February-yes, it must have been February-1848. and reading on the placard outside some newspaper office: Revolution in Paris-Abdication of King Louis Philippe. That has always marked for me the beginning of a new era in the history of the stretch of time that lies within my own recollection. You know what followed in the political world-how the thrones tottered and toppled all over Europe. But the revolution seems to have been intellectual as much as political. There was the coming into the air of all sorts of new speculative notions. One is sometimes inclined to wonder whether, at such a period, the earth may not have sailed into some new region of space, so that the air had become impregnated with new principles. That, of course, is mere whimsy; but who can say that the transition from one spiritual period to

another may not be marked by some actual change in the telluric conditions, rendering men's nerves more responsive to one set of stimuli, more insensible to another? At any rate, one remembers the effects of the 1848 revolution as not incomparable with those of the first French Revolution, sixty years earlier, of which we are told:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven.

That is scarcely too much to say of the exaltation of mind throughout Europe during the years that followed 1848; and it is likely enough, I think, that the present may come to be regarded as a period of reaction from the flush of confidence in the high destinies of mankind, and the approaching solution of the great problems of social well-being, which then suffused the whole atmosphere of thought.

W. A. We may take it for granted, I suppose, that a positive fervour is more likely than a negative conviction to give a man the power of impressing himself forcibly upon the imagination of the world; whereas, now-a-days, wisdom seems, for the moment, to lie in the negative, the restrictive direction. Looking back upon the men of the mid-century, we have to say: "They were over-hasty; they were over-sanguine; the problem is more complex than they imagined, its solution more remote." Even the denunciatory prophets of that period—Carlyle and Ruskin—fulminated from the standpoint of a simple ethical system which we do not now find to tally with the facts. A man of their genius and temper coming to the front to-day could no longer feel the

serene confidence in the plenitude of his inspiration which was half the secret of their impressiveness. Is not that so?

Professor Masson. Yes, I dare say there is something in that. What lay at the root of the optimism both of Tennyson and of Browning seems to have been a fervent, unfaltering faith in the immortality of the human soul. Is there any poet now who so distinctly finds inspiration in that belief? You are perhaps more conversant than I with the new generation of poets; but it seems to me that we have to make our account with a great weakening of the old metaphysical supports of religion.

W. A. Well, there are some of the younger poets, with Francis Thompson at their head, who profess an allegiance to dogmatic Christianity of the Roman Catholic type; but, to tell the truth, I think the immortality of the soul is not the dogma that means most to them. Their faith in it strikes me as verbal rather than real. At any rate, one does not find them singing with Tennysonian rapture of the time

When we shall stand transfigured, like Christ on Hermon Hill, And moving each to music, soul in soul and light in light, Shall flash thro' one another in a moment as we will.

Of the non-Catholic poets, the majority, I fancy, think of the hereafter rather with A. E. Housman, who sings, in the character of his "Shropshire Lad":

"Tis a long way farther than Knighton,
A quieter place than Clun,
Where doomsday may thunder and lighten
And little 'twill matter to one.

Stephen Phillips, indeed, has somewhere spoken with emphasis of the unreality of death; but I gather—I may be wrong—that he bases his faith on psychical research rather than on religion.

Professor Masson. That suggests another feature of the present situation that must be borne in mind. The magic word of the past half-century, in the domain of science, seems to have lost a good deal of its virtue. "Evolution" is no longer the ultimate and all-illuminating conception it once appeared to be. We still hear everywhere, indeed, of "Evolution," "Evolution," in every possible form of the notion-from the evolution of the modern dress-coat to the evolution of the Idea of God-and the legitimate applications of the doctrine and the phrase are by no means yet exhausted. But there are symptoms as if the doctrine were likely to be succeeded in the supremacy now possessed by it over the spirit of man-succeeded by some new physical conception, perhaps even now on the threshold of consciousness. The probability seems to be that this new revelation will come to us out of the realms of the grander or Transcendental Physics. A memorable paragraph in Newton's Principia was that in which, declaring that he could hardly conceive how any scientifically trained mind could suppose the action of one material body upon another through an absolute vacuum, he threw out the hypothesis of a certain extremely attenuated physical something, quidam spiritus, omnipresent in space, and not only filling the intervals between the great celestial orbs, but interpenetrating also all material substances whatever, and concerned with their molecular workings. The suggestion was

long neglected or refused; but of late the chiefs of our modern Natural Philosophers have been again on the track so indicated, laboriously busy with the speculations and investigations to which it leads. The results have been already momentous. No longer, for example, can we keep to the hitherto customary conception of our Earth as surrounded by an atmosphere so many miles thick, beyond which there is a sheer vacuum till some planet or star is struck. There is no such thing, we are now told, as a vacuum anywhere in the Universe; all the interspaces between suns, stars and planets, are actually filled, as Newton imagined them to be, by a subtle physical something, provisionally called ether, through which there are incessant jelly-like shudderings and vibrations. Respecting this ether and its nature and manifestations we have much more to learn; but we seem to be on the eve of the advent of a doctrine,say a doctrine of a greater simultaneity throughout space than has hitherto been dreamt of,-which may modify in future no less our metaphysical than our physical conceptions.

W. A. You think, then, that we are, so to speak, in a slack-water stage, between the high tide of evolutionary doctrine and that of the next great scientific generalisation?

Professor Masson. As it is but a small portion of what is ordinarily called literature that has ever consisted, or ever can consist, of expositions of scientific or philosophical doctrines, the relevancy of such big matters as we have just been speaking of to the topic immediately on hand may not be apparent. But, in the first place, if we are to accept it as a fact that there

has been a falling off in the poetry, and the creative literature generally, of the present time as compared with the past, may not this be partly accounted for by the unusual energy of the knowing faculty of late, the extraordinary achievements of that faculty, the drifting of so large a proportion of the ablest intellects of recent years into the service of science? In the second place, are not the extraordinary recent achievements in science of all kinds, and the alertness of science for ever new triumphs, some of them already in sight, proofs positive that the strength of the human intellect for any purpose whatever is not yet exhausted, or near exhaustion, and suggestions, therefore, that, as soon as the great generalisations of recent and present science shall have been sufficiently worked into man's modes of thinking on all subjects, there may be a return to the older Muses, with the reappearance of a poetry as worthy as has ever been in the world, but strangely reinvigorated and refreshed?

W. A. Then what is the upshot, as regards the alleged dearth of individual greatness in the generation of to-day?

Professor Masson. The upshot, I should say, is that, in so far as the alleged dearth is real at all, it results from transient conditions, such as have often before come into play on the threshold of periods which now rank among the greatest in the history of the human intellect.

W. A. Not long ago I tried to prove—and my argument passed muster with some good men—that an observer of 1840, when the great Victorian harvest was ripening every hour, might have found quite as plausible reasons as an observer of to-day can possibly allege for

bewailing the barrenness of the literary field. I won't trouble you with the details of the argument, for my time is getting short; but I think, if you look back, you will find that men who had given unquestionable evidence of commanding genius were no more numerous in 1840 than to-day.

Professor Masson. It would take some time to make the comparison, and even then it might be deceptive. But I don't need any such argument to inspire me, as I look about among the crowd of our eminent contemporaries in all walks of literature, with faith that, as Keats said:

Other spirits there are, standing apart Upon the forehead of the age to come.

W. A. (at the door, catching sight of a photograph hanging on the wall). Surely I know that place! It is Milton's cottage at Chalfont St. Giles, is it not?

Professor Masson. Yes, that is it—the only house now remaining that Milton inhabited—and he occupied it only for a few months. Do you know—many people don't—that the ghost of the house in which Milton began his Paradise Lost—in which he lived when he was Latin secretary to Cromwell, and in which his blindness became total—is somewhere enclosed now in the huge bulk of the Queen Anne Mansions? I saw the house perishing under the pickaxe to make way for that colossus. I even made some little effort to save it; but, of course, it couldn't be done.

W. A. Do you never come to London now, Professor Masson?

Professor Masson. Oh yes. I do not despair of another visit ere very long.

W. A. Then I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you. Till then, good-bye—and many thanks.

[Exit.

September, 1901.

Conversation VIII. With Mr. Spenser Wilkinson.

Scene: Mr. Wilkinson's study at Chelsea. Time: A winter's afternoon, between 2 and 3. Lamps lighted everywhere.

Mr. Wilkinson. You have found your way, then, through the fog?

W. A. Yes. Fortunately, I have a pretty fair sense of locality, and having once got the bearings of a place in my head,

I do not ask to see
The distant scene: one step enough for me.

Mr. Wilkinson. You ought to be a politician—nay, a Minister. Newman's lines have apparently been the watchword of British statesmanship for many generations.

W. A. That brings me straight to what I want to ask you. I know your ideal statesman: the man who has learned all the lessons history has to teach; the man who views the whole world as a gigantic chessboard, calculates his game many moves ahead, sees clearly all the possible moves of his adversaries, and knows how he will counter them—in short, the new and improved Bismarck for whom you sigh. Well, I want to know whether in these days of fog and faction, you see him looming anywhere on the horizon?

Mr. Wilkinson. I see from the tone of your question that you are infected with the good old British prejudice in favour of the amateur—at any rate in



MR. SPENSER WILKINSON.

From a photograph by Elliott & Fry, London.

statesmanship. Oh, don't protest! I know that attitude of mind very well, and I know what is to be said for it. On the whole, we have done far from badly in the past by our pet method of muddling through. I am not myself exempt from the national instinct which tells us that because a thing seems reasonable it is probably wrong. At the same time I cannot help thinking that both induction and deduction, both history and common sense, point to the simple conclusion that a statesman, like a shoemaker, is all the better for knowing his business—for knowing the material with which he has to deal, the form he wants to impress upon it, and the surest and most effectual methods of doing so.

W. A. But you do not answer my question.

Mr. Wilkinson. I want first, if possible, to place you at my point of view-to show you that I am not idly clamouring for a "strong man" as a sort of miraculous nostrum for all the ills of the body politic. Far from it! The individual "strong man," in the Carlylean sense, is often a delusion and a snare. The strongest of men must die, and he cannot bequeath his strength to his successors. The system of which he was the one possible keystone crumbles to ruin, and after Oliver Cromwell you have first Richard and then the Restoration. No. what I want-what I work foris a unified conception of the national life, which shall give each man a conscious duty of doing his work, whatever it may be as a service to the State and a belief that he can best serve the State even as a private citizen by being a master of his trade, and doing well whatever he undertakes. That is a spirit

which would remove the reproach that we are a nation of amateurs. If it once possessed us, we should have at the head of each department of State, a Cabinet Minister who thoroughly understood the business of that department.

- W. A. You think we lack such a conception, then?
- Mr. Wilkinson. I know we do. Of patriotism, in the sense of a blind, instinctive chauvinism, we have enough and to spare. But we have not, as a people, any clear realisation of the world at large and England's place and function in it. We do not, as a people, realise our duty to the State, nor the State's relation to the other political organisms among which its lot is cast on this little planet. What is the human race? Is it a multitude of individuals?
- W. A. Well, Siamese twins excepted, I have always imagined so.
- Mr. Wilkinson. It is nothing of the sort. It is a multitude of communities. "Man is a political animal." The human race is known only in the form of crowds of men always having intercourse and friction with one another. A man, before he is a human being in general, is an Englishman, a Frenchman, a German, a Turk, or what not. I hold with Plato and with Aristotle, that the civilising instrument is the community, the State, the medium in which we all live. The essential condition of the existence of the State is that it should be able to keep its place in the competition which necessarily arises between expanding organisms in a limited space. Therefore the first function of a Government is self-defence; and this

process is continuously carried on: in an ordinary way by diplomacy; at exceptional crises, by war.

W. A. But does not everybody, except the Anarchists, recognise all this?

Mr. Wilkinson. No; during the middle years of the nineteenth century-say from 1830 to 1880-England practically forgot the fact. Whatever party happened to be in power, the dominant ideas of that period were the ideas of the Manchester Liberalism, which, by the way, was my own starting-point. That Liberalism took practically no notice of pressure from without, but regarded the country as shut off from the rest of the world by a ring-fence, and thought of nothing but the organisation and development of the community within the magic circle. As it happened, the pressure on the ring-fence was, for a time, very slight. The end of the Napoleonic Wars had left us unassailable. We had the power of doing what we liked in any corner of the earth that touched the sea; we engaged in no wars that seriously mattered to us; anything that could threaten our national existence seemed infinitely But the years between 1870 and 1880 changed all that, and shattered, or ought to have shattered, the illusions of our Utopia. Germany, which had been divided, became united, and she and other nations began to want to move about in the They naturally came in contact with us in world. every corner, and brought home to us the fact that we hadn't a private hemisphere of our own. We found that the sea could by no stretch of metaphor be made to serve as a ring-fence, but was, in fact, a high-road open to all-the medium of intercourse, and therefore also of friction, between different communities. It became a necessity—the indispensable condition even of our internal development—that our external organisation, so to speak, should be as complete and efficient as that of any of our neighbours. But this can never be, so long as the ring-fence superstition survives in the national mind.

W. A. And you think it does?

Mr. Wilkinson. Think! I am sure of it. Don't we see it on every hand?—in the notion that England can afford to neglect the simplest precautions for her safety; can afford to go on working by rule of thumb where other nations work by scientific method; can afford to leave to amateurs the functions which other nations entrust only to highly-skilled experts. I am the last to deny, mind you, that England has many advantages, in her situation, in her traditions, in her national character. But these advantages will be our ruin if they delude us into the belief that we may be slack where others are strenuous, that we may be somnolent where others are wide awake.

W. A. Well, now, look here—let us go to the root of the matter, and inquire, 'point by point, how you would build up an efficient England, with that enlightened conception of the national life which you regard—rightly, I am sure—as the beginning of political wisdom. At the root of the matter I presume we shall find education. What is your educational programme?

Mr. Wilkinson. That is a large question. Suppose we narrow it by confining our attention to, roughly speaking, the public school boy—the boy who is likely to go into the army, the navy, the civil service, one of

the professions, or to become a merchant, a manufacturer, a captain of industry.

W. A. Agreed. What do you say, then, to our public school system?

Mr. Wilkinson. It has certainly its good points. It proceeds upon the excellent idea that "manners maketh man," and the further excellent idea that games help to lay a sound basis of character. But one thing our public schools do not inculcate, and that is the love of knowledge for its own sake—the most important element in intellectual, as distinct from moral, education.

W. A. "Knowledge for its own sake"—is that quite what you mean? Shouldn't you rather say that they lead a boy to regard knowledge as an ornamental adjunct to life—at most as a key to unlock certain examination doors, and then to be thrown away—not as an indispensable condition of efficiency? They present knowledge as an instrument of culture rather than as a source of power.

Mr. Wilkinson. Our public school system tends to keep a boy wholly out of touch with actuality. It gives him no practical knowledge of the world around him, with its physical, moral, and political phenomena. It crams certain pigeon-holes in his mind, leaves others entirely vacant, and makes no attempt to give his acquirements, such as they are, any bearing upon his duties as a citizen of his country or of the world. Even in impressing on him the notion (often valuable in itself) of "good form," we lay too much stress on "Thou shalt not" and not enough on "Thou shalt." It is by what he does, not by what he leaves undone,

that a man becomes great—not by avoiding errors, but by doing great things. We give a boy no help towards forming a vital idea of his purpose in life; yet such an idea is the best possible bracing and steadying influence. As a matter of historical fact, the conception of duty springs entirely from a man's relation to the community in which he lives.

W. A. In short, according to you, duty is sublimated esprit de corps. But is not esprit de corps exactly what is acquired at a good English public school?

Mr. Wilkinson. Yes, but not the realisation that the full development of our intellectual, as well as of our physical, faculties is part of the larger *esprit de corps* which we call patriotism.

W. A. What changes should you advocate, then, in the actual educational curriculum?

Mr. Wilkinson. If you come to think of it, is it not strange how little our ideal of education has moved with the time? How immense have been the results of the past century of labour in the field of knowledge, which is the field of existence! The modern man of the best type has a grasp of the universe, of the globe, of the human race, its development, its history, its place in nature, that no one could possibly possess a hundred years ago. Now, that grasp ought to be specially characteristic of those who direct the national education, and their object ought to be to impart it to every person in proportion to the number of years that he is to remain at school. We are talking of boys who are likely to remain at school till they are nineteen, and perhaps after that to go to college. In the case of these boys, I should postpone by one or two years the

beginning of Latin, should place much earlier the beginning of the natural sciences, and should largely increase the amount of pure mathematics taught in the early stages.

W. A. Would you apply the mathematical drill to all boys, irrespective of their intended path in life?

Mr. Wilkinson. To all boys. Latin should be begun, as I say, comparatively late, and taught by the most modern methods. In this way it would not occupy the wholly disproportionate time now devoted to it. Greek I would teach only to boys who are going in for an advanced literary education. The ordinary smattering of Greek is of very little use. History, now so much neglected, should be much more prominent. But, above all things, knowledge should not be forced upon boys in isolated fragments, whose irrelevance and apparent uselessness they resent. One thing should lead to another: the inter-relation of the various branches should be made clear, as well as the relation of the whole to the purpose of life. And education should not be conceived as a mere conventional preliminary to the business of life—a preliminary which, in the normal course of things, should cease and be forgotten the moment the young man goes forth into the world. It should be regarded as only the initial stage of the process of mental development which should go on through adolescence and maturity. No man is really educated who has not learnt at least as much between twenty and forty as he did between ten and twenty.

W. A. From what I can see of public school

methods, I gather that our pedagogues have never heard of the science of pedagogy, or at any rate are resolved not to admit its existence.

- Mr. Wilkinson. There you have it! What is the matter with us is that we do not believe in the organisation of knowledge and intelligence. Yet that is precisely what we want.
- W. A. Apply that principle, now, to the question of defence. Supposing we had a rational system of education, how would it affect the army?
- Mr. Wilkinson. The army itself ought to be a great educational institution, in which the officers are the teachers. That is the ideal; but the practice does not sufficiently correspond to it. We have a great many zealous, devoted officers; but in too many instances they are hampered not merely by the old tradition which ignored their function as teachers, but by the inadequacy of their own previous general education. In too many cases, our officers cannot teach because they will not learn. They have not had that thorough secondary education which qualifies them to sit down to a subject, or even to a single book, and really master it. They find the literature of their profession tedious, because they have not had the mental training which should enable them to grasp and assimilate itso they prefer to read novels.
- W. A. A distinguished general the other day recommended historical novels as a sound basis for a military education.
- Mr. Wilkinson. Yes, and what came of that principle? Colenso and Spion Kop!
 - W. A. Would you put a boy who was intended for

the army through the course of study you sketched a few minutes ago?

- Mr. Wilkinson. Yes, minus the Latin. I should insist instead on very high French and German, not only for practical purposes, but because it is in these languages that an officer can get at the literature of his profession. But as regards professional training for the army, I should be disposed to set up two standards: a good general education for all, but a very first-class education for officers who are to take leading positions -staff officers and cavalry officers. One of our great troubles is our cavalry. Rank for rank, a cavalry officer requires far more knowledge than an infantry officer. He requires greater intelligence, greater quickness. He should be specially taught strategy and tactics. But what we find in our army is that only rich men can go into the cavalry-men of whom I hear, from those who see more of them than I do, that they will not work or take their profession seriously. A Minister who was in earnest in his effort to give us an efficient army would change all that. He would say, "I will double the pay of the cavalry officer, but I must have double work out of him."
- W. A. Might not reform begin at the other end—in the reduction of the obligatory expenses?
- Mr. Wilkinson. Something can be done in that way, too. But if you want to make men work, you must be prepared to pay.
- W. A. Is not our army already the most expensive in the world?
- Mr. Wilkinson. That is partly a necessity of our political situation, but partly, too, the result of our

habit of economising at the wrong points. But there is one thing that people do not realise, and that is, not only that efficient defence must be paid for, but that it is supremely worth paying for. People do not realise how much of their prosperity, their own moral character and backbone, is due to the tradition of belonging to a great nation. For a beaten nation, the whole conditions of life would be changed; and a beaten nation we shall be if our "patriotism" consists in assuming that an Englishman requires to do and to sacrifice less for his country than any other man in Europe. If England is to help us, we must help England. Any one who ventures to hint that we are neither invincible nor invulnerable must be prepared to find himself denounced as an alarmist; but speaking as one who has devoted the best years of his life to the study of these questions, I can assure you that, as matters stand at present-with our navy scattered all over the world, and with no adequate or properly organised army for home defence—we are well within the range of a great national disaster. Napoleon failed in his designed invasion, because the British fleets, splendidly efficient after ten years of war practice, were handled by men who thoroughly understood the conditions of naval strategy; while the French navy, ruined during the Revolution before the war began, had never during the war the opportunity to provide itself with a similar training, either for officers or men. The French navy was handicapped by these conditions. But to-day foreign navies are not handicapped in that way, and their head people have made far more systematic studies of strategy and tactics than have our own. With a large part of our navy at the ends of the earth, it is conceivable that our home-guard fleet might be held up long enough to enable an enemy to land 100,000 men in this country. The operation, if attempted at all, would be done so suddenly and so quickly that there is a fair chance of such an invading force being stronger than anything that, in the first few days, could be got together to attack it.

- W. A. But would not the British fleet, reassembling, cut off the invader's retreat?
- Mr. Wilkinson. It is not so easy as you think to concentrate a fleet which is dispersed in widely separated squadrons. It is quite on the cards that our fleet might be taken piecemeal and beaten, squadron by squadron. But even admitting that we regain and keep possession of the sea, it is a question whether an enemy, once landed in any force, might not, if he won a great decisive battle, be able to dictate his own terms. For a prolonged resistance, after the loss of a first great battle, a large area is necessary. England is so small that a decisive defeat might very probably cripple us altogether. Could the people of this country make head for any length of time against the terrors, despairs, and miseries caused by the presence of a victorious hostile army? Upon my word, I don't know
- W. A. Then what is to be done to prevent this interesting question from being answered by experiment? What can place us above the danger of invasion?
- Mr. Wilkinson. Two things: a more judicious distribution of our fleet (which should also be consider-

ably strengthened), and a total reorganisation of our home army.

W. A. By what means? Conscription?

Mr. Wilkinson. Well, one would naturally like to work the army without conscription; though, let me tell you, conscription would be by no means an unmixed evil. Our people are too undisciplined. They require to have the national idea brought home to them—the idea that every man is a member of a community to which he owes everything, even to the giving up of his property and of life itself. Compel every man to do his share of the nation's work, and the result will be that every man will see his relation to the State in a truer light. Then, too, conscription would solve one of the great difficulties of national defence—the difficulty of getting sufficient men for the navy.

W. A. But surely the two services could not be placed on the same footing with regard to conscription, the apprenticeship for the navy being so much longer and more arduous than for the army.

Mr. Wilkinson. Nevertheless you would probably find that a considerable proportion of men would prefer naval to military service—a sufficient proportion to keep the navy well up to fighting strength. Then of course there would have to be a carefully devised list of exemptions from service; and, just as in Germany, the man who could show a good standard of secondary education would get off with a shorter military training. I assure you, many worse things might befall the country than the introduction of compulsory military service.

W. A. Still, you think it might be possible to make

ourselves reasonably secure without conscription? By what means?

- Mr. Wilkinson. Why, by such a reorganisation of the volunteer force as would make it really a fighting instrument.
- W. A. And how would you set about that? Would you alter the conditions to which a man submits himself on enlisting?
- Mr. Wilkinson. Not much. I would, of course, increase the ludicrously small number of annual drills by which a man (after his recruit's year) can make himself "efficient"; I would make yearly attendance in camps compulsory; and I would insist on a higher standard of musketry. Every man should do a great deal more firing with ball cartridge, and little or none with blank—a most demoralising practice. But it is in organisation, and in the training of officers, that the chief alterations would have to be made.
- W. A. My own small experience as a volunteer has led me sometimes to wonder whether a certain sprinkling of professional officers, over and above the existing adjutants, might not do a good deal to raise the standard of the force.
- Mr. Wilkinson. Yes; but how would you effect this "sprinkling"?
- W. A. Oh, don't ask me, the most blundering private that ever wrestled with a Slade-Wallace equipment.
- Mr. Wilkinson. Well, this is what I would do: I would organise the force in small brigades of not more than four battalions each. Every battalion should have its volunteer commanding officer; but over each brigade I should place a professional brigadier, senior

to all the battalion commanders; and he should have a professional brigade-major under him. Then I would not attach an adjutant to each battalion (these gentlemen, under the present system, have not nearly enough to do), but would allot two adjutants to each brigade. It would then be the brigadier's business to educate the officers of his brigade. As for the volunteer company-officers, I should insist on getting a great deal more head-work out of them.

W. A. Do you think it is possible for your barrister, or civil servant, or stockbroker to give enough time to military work to make himself a really efficient officer?

Mr. Wilkinson. Perfectly possible. In many cases he need not give much more time than he does at present. Suppose he devotes two evenings a week to the corps: a great part of that time is at present taken up in mechanical repetitions of elementary things with which he is perfectly familiar. If one of these evenings was devoted to study under a first-rate instructor, the volunteer officer would learn a great deal in the course of the year. Then I should insist upon his going through two or three special courses of instruction of a month or six weeks each; and on his proving that he had duly profited by them, I would pay him liberally for the time thus employed. Furthermore, I would provide him with a thoroughly good text-book of the art of war, and insist on his studying it. Even for the private soldier (regular or volunteer) I would have very much simplified text-books, written in good English, readable, and interesting. We proceed far too much on the general assumption that the

British soldier cannot read or write. I would go on the opposite assumption, and would take care that it should be justified.

- W. A. Do you attach weight to the current theories that science will presently put an end to war by making it a process of universal massacre?
- Mr. Wilkinson. As far as war is concerned, the one great effect of the progress of science is to make more and more overwhelming the advantage possessed by the more intelligent and better organised nation.
- W. A. So far, so good. But these reforms will not make themselves. If they are to be compassed at all, they must be engineered by experts at the head of the various departments of Government. In speaking of education, we touched only on the public schools—a small, though of course very important, part of the whole educational problem. What chance is there, do you think, that that problem will ever be tackled, in a large and far-seeing spirit, by the most accomplished expert that the country can produce? What chance is there that we shall ever have a master of military science, in place of a bewildered amateur, at the head of the War Office? What chance is there that we shall ever have a man of high political genius, vision, and faculty at the head of the Government?
- Mr. Wilkinson. You are asking me, in brief, whether I consider our English tradition of democracy compatible with the requirements of national defence, in the largest sense of the words?
 - W. A. Yes, that is about what I want to get at.
- Mr. Wilkinson. Well, I think my answer would be, that I see no reason why the traditions of our democracy

should not adapt themselves, with no very great strain, to the needs of efficient government. The amateur in office is no essential part of our system. It was never a good plan, but it was far less disastrous a hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, than it is to-day. The great advance of knowledge in that time, and the enormously increased complexity of technical detail, has rendered absolutely necessary a great specialisation of function. Go through the old Victory at Portsmouth, and compare her, simply as a machine, with a modern line-of-battle ship. You may take that as a type of the increased complexity of the problems with which the head of a department has now-a-days to grapple. Some day it must be manifest to every one that the ability to make telling party speeches does not necessarily qualify a man to organise a modern army or to keep a modern navy up to the requisite pitch of efficiency. Some day-if only it be not too late!

W. A. Then you do not think this system can be defended on the ground that the Minister is only the ornamental head of his department and its mouthpiece in Parliament, while the real work is done by the permanent officials?

Mr. Wilkinson. If that system had no other defects, it would be sufficiently condemned by the partition of responsibility which it involves.

W. A. Admitting, then, that the amateur in office is no inseparable part of our system, but only a survival from a time when he was comparatively innocuous, to whom do you look for a reform of this outgrown system?

Mr. Wilkinson. Ah, there we come back to the question of the "strong man."

W. A. Let me put it in this way: what have you to say to the doctrine of that other Sage of Chelsea whom you mentioned before, that democracy always tends to place at the head of affairs the weak man, the windbag, the painted lath, instead of the strong man, the man of real metal?

Mr. Wilkinson. To that I say that I don't believe it. I believe that men have a strong natural gift for detecting a true leader, and an equally strong tendency to follow him when once they have found him. The "mandate" theory of democracy, which would make a nominal leader in reality the mere tool of a majority, seems to me absurd. I hold it to be the function of a leader really to lead, in accordance with his own insight, his own wisdom. But on the other hand I think that the people of this country have a very fair instinct for discerning, at a given moment, the best available man to whom to entrust their destinies. For the choosing of a Prime Minister the rough plebiscite of a general election is no bad device.

W. A. Then you trust that if—or when—the "strong man" presents himself, the democracy will rally to him?

Mr. Wilkinson. I don't doubt that it will; and I think he will have a splendid opportunity before him. The country is profoundly dissatisfied with itself. There is no other country where criticism is so severe. The public mind is full of a good, healthy discontent, and it should need no unattainable genius to turn that dissatisfaction to practical effect, and to reorganise the

departments of Government in such a way as to bring the best intellect and skill of the nation to bear on the different problems involved. Of course, to do this he would have to look for most of his men outside the ordinary political gangs. One thing he would almost certainly do would be to reduce the size of the Cabinet, and thus increase at once the power and the responsibility of each member. But I need not go into all these details. Of one thing I am sure—that if the country saw a man really in earnest as to the necessity for introducing a high standard of efficiency into all branches of the public service, it would rise to him and support him, vigorously and enthusiastically.

W. A. Do you see the "strong man" looming anywhere on the horizon?

Mr. Wilkinson. A few years ago, when I published a book called *The Great Alternative*, I sent a copy of it to a certain eminent statesman, whom I won't name, with this inscription on the fly-leaf: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

W. A. And has that question answered itself? Or are you still in doubt?

Mr. Wilkinson. Perhaps I am-perhaps not.

W. A. Well, if you are going to be so oracular as all that, I may as well sally forth into the fog again.

Exit.

November, 1901.



 $\label{eq:to_face} \textit{To face } p.~175.$ MR. WILLIAM HEINEMANN.

Conversation IX. With Mr. William Heinemann.

Scene: A garden on the seaboard of the Roman Campagna, sloping to the Mediterranean. W. A. discovered reading. To him enter Mr. Heinemann.

- Mr. Heinemann. Good-morning. Don't you find the sun rather hot there?
 - W. A. I was just thinking I should have to move.
- Mr. Heinemann. Come and sit here in the shade. . . What a glorious morning!
- W. A. There's no trace of those islands on the horizon.
- Mr. Heinemann. That means steady fine weather. When the islands are visible, rain is not far off.
 - W. A. And meanwhile in England-
- Mr. Heinemann. I have letters this morning,—frost, fog, sleet, slush, every possible abomination.
- W. A. I don't wonder that people don't read books in such a climate as this.
 - Mr. Heinemann. But you were reading when I came!
- W. A. Only a bad habit contracted by my ancestors in centuries of Scotch mists. I can't shake it off, even here. Confess, now, that you wouldn't like to be a publisher in the land of the dolce far niente.
- Mr. Heinemann. Oh, there's no confessing about it. Reading is naturally an indoor employment, and the climate that tends to keep people indoors tends, other things being equal, to beget a nation of readers. But even the English climate has its drawbacks. From the

point of view of the book-trade, the far troppo is as bad as the far niente. Not to mention the rush of business, that leaves men no time for reading, just think how much of the average Englishman's leisure time and spare cash goes to outdoor sports!

W. A. Then what is your general feeling as to the state of the book-market in England? Are things, on the whole, getting better or worse?

Mr. Heinemann. Undoubtedly better—very distinctly better. Of course we have great difficulties to contend with, but we are gradually overcoming them.

W. A. Difficulties? Such as ?

Mr. Heinemann. Well, there are many; but the fundamental difficulty is of course, in a crowded market, to get books shown and seen. This some of us are meeting by the gradual introduction and adaptation of the Continental system of supplying books to the booksellers "on sale." It is my own practice, for instance, in the case of almost all books except novels, to allow any bookseller whom I know to be trustworthy to have as many copies as he is likely to dispose of "on sale or return."

W. A. And you find the plan answer?

Mr. Heinemann. Most certainly. It is the only way of enabling the majority of books of the better class to get at their public.

W. A. What about wear and tear and depreciation of the stock you issue in this way?

Mr. Heinemann. Of course that is an item that has to be allowed for. The English custom of binding all books before publication stands a little in the way of this system. A German or French paper-covered book,

if it gets soiled or faded in the bookseller's shop, can be re-covered for a fraction of a farthing; whereas in England it may cost ninepence, or a shilling, or more, to re-bind a shop-soiled book. That is only one of several drawbacks to the system, that conservative members of the Publishers' Association enlarge upon. I admit all these drawbacks, fully, freely. But I say that the greatest drawback of all is to fail to sell your books.

- W. A. You had a good deal to do with the founding of the Publishers' Association, had you not?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, I believe I may call myself one of the prime movers in that matter.
- W. A. And, of course, having to deal with English men-of-business, you found plenty of opposition—plenty of sheer stick-in-the-mud inertia—to be overcome?
- Mr. Heinemann. Some. But on the whole I found ready and intelligent support. And, as a matter of fact, the Publishers' Association, though only six years old, is a great success, and has already done wonderful work.
- W. A. To the outsider, it certainly seems to stand to reason that publishers ought to organise themselves for concerted action, just as doctors, barristers, solicitors, even authors and actors, do.
- Mr. Heinemann. As you say, it stands to reason. But the thing that stands to reason is precisely the thing that the mind of the majority is slowest to accept.
- W. A. Yes, I suppose we English have a hereditary bias towards methods of unreason. What, then, should you say was the special function of the Publishers' Association?

Mr. Heinemann. It has many functions. Personally I have always thought the education of booksellers one of its most important functions. You may think it a paradox, but it's not far from the literal truth, that many booksellers in England never see a book of any value or importance, but live entirely by peddling novels, old and new. The book-trade will never be in a thoroughly healthy condition until we have a body of selected and trained booksellers all over the country. to whom we give depôts of books on sale, and say to them, "Now, sell these-don't merely wait till people come to buy them, but sell them-that is your business!" English booksellers, with rare exceptions, have never realised, or have forgotten, that bookselling is no mere mechanical function, like handing out tickets for the Twopenny Tube, but is a calling that demands a great deal of intelligence, enterprise, and skill. bookseller who really knew his business-I am speaking especially of the country and suburban trade-would never bother about the chance customers who came to his shop.

W. A. Hallo! isn't that going rather too far?

Mr. Heinemann. Oh, don't misunderstand me. He would see that the people who came to his shop had all possible attention,—a great deal more intelligent attention than they receive at present. What I mean is, that he would regard them as the accidents and accessories of his business, the main part of which would be the fostering and supplying of a steady demand among regular customers, many of whom might not come to his shop twice in the year.

W. A. Then how would he get at them?

- Mr. Heinemann. In various ways. Largely through prospectuses and circulars-of the skilled use of which the English bookseller has as yet no idea. But in many cases he would put the actual books before the people who he knew would be likely to want them. Look at our scores of large towns inhabited mainly by people of means and leisure-who ought to be the backbone of the reading public-and you will find that there the bookselling trade is conducted with incredible negligence and stupidity. Ask a bookseller in any well-to-do seaside resort, for instance, whether he has even a list of possible customers for special professional books, and he will tell you that he has never thought of keeping one. But every German bookseller, for instance, has not only a list, but a carefully classified list, of his clientèle, and can tell at a glance how many he can rely upon to buy this book, how many to buy To take an obvious example, he knows that such and such a doctor is a throat specialist: he sends to his house, without waiting for an order, a new book on diseases of the larynx; and if the doctor doesn't want it, he fetches it away again in a day or two. Another doctor is a chest specialist: to him he sends a book on the Nordrach open-air cure-and so forth.
- W. A. But don't you think that people in England would be apt to be rather irritated by this system of "pushfulness"?
- Mr. Heinemann. Certainly, if it were not applied with intelligence and tact. But bookselling ought to be a skilled, and a highly skilled, employment—that is precisely the point I am insisting on. You, I dare say, collect books on the drama?

- W. A. Yes, in a very modest way.
- Mr. Heinemann. Well, if I deluge you with prospectuses of books on horse-racing, or bimetallism, you think me a fool, and throw my circulars into the wastepaper basket, with comments to that effect. But I don't suppose you would be irritated if I sent you a prospectus of a book, say, on the French stage—or even, for inspection, the book itself.
- W. A. I should probably call down on you the curse appointed for those who lead us into temptation—but I should very likely succumb.
- Mr. Heinemann. The long and the short of it is, the bookseller should not be a mere penny-in-the-slot machine, but an intelligent intermediary between the publisher and the reading public. That is why I am utterly opposed to the mixing up of bookselling with other trades, and will always move heaven and earth to check the tendency. For instance, the Newsvendors' Association, a very powerful body, with five or six thousand members, relying largely on quite extraneous trades for their business, is putting pressure upon us to publish novels at prices so low that they could stock them, to the detriment of the legitimate booksellers whose business is the distribution of all classes of literature.
- W. A. I can see the importance of what you say. It would certainly be an immense advantage to literature if booksellers, as a class, were educated men who took an intelligent interest in their calling. But what is the chance of attracting such men to the business?
 - Mr. Heinemann. To an intelligent man, is there any

branch of commerce that ought to be more attractive? Why, in Germany even the assistants in a bookseller's shop are men of education, often university men. Bookselling is there regarded as one of the liberal professions. And why should it not be? Last year I attended the Congress of Booksellers and Publishers at Leipzig. Four hundred representatives were assembled from every part of the globe; and a lady of exceptional insight, who was present at some of the sittings, remarked that it was very seldom you saw in any public body so many notably intelligent physiognomies.

- W. A. Speaking of Germany, I wish you would explain a matter that has always puzzled me. Who finances the enormous scientific and philological literature of Germany? The press teems with long and learned treatises, the mere setting of which must cost considerable sums, and which cannot possibly have a large sale. Can you explain to me how this vast literature is kept going?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, I can: by the splendid organisation of the book-trade. Of course there are other things to be taken into account. In the first place, Germany abounds in small "endowments of research." It swarms with professors and "docents," each with his small salaried post, living with a frugality incredible to an Englishman of similar status, and devoting his life to his Fach, his special study, out of sheer love of it. It is these men that write the books you speak of.
- W. A. Oh yes, I quite understand how they come to be written; it is the fact of their ever getting printed and published that puzzles me.

Mr. Heinemann. Well, of course the cost of manufacture is somewhat less in Germany than in England. But that isn't the real secret. It is, as I say, the perfect organisation of the book-trade. You see, the men that write these books also read and must possess these books. Each of them, that is to say, must have the books of his own special study-they are the tools of his trade. Well, the booksellers know this; and, all over the country, they know how to get at these men with the greatest certainty and the least expense. You know how many specialist magazines there are in Germany-Archiv for this, that, and the other thing. Why, there are two or three in connection with English literature alone - Anglia, Englische Studien, The English World, and so forth. Each of these will have its constant body of subscribers, and the subscribers to the magazines may be confidently reckoned upon to buy the books appertaining to the same study, which are often merely the overflow from the magazines-treatises too long for insertion. Then there are a great number of university libraries and similar institutions, which must have all scientific publications. Thus the sale of one of these learned works can be foretold almost to a copy. And remember that there are no advertising expenses to be reckoned with. Literary advertisements are almost unknown in Germany, except in the case of big productions such as a popular encyclo-For most books only one advertisement is needed-in the Buchhändler Börsenblatt. This paper is read conscientiously every morning by every bookseller throughout the length and breadth of Germany; and,

knowing his *clientèle* to a nicety, he knows almost to a nicety how many copies of any given book he must write for.

W. A. Then it seems to me that newspaper proprietors ought to pray night and morning that the English book-trade may never be "organised" on the German model. What would the poor newspapers do without the publishers' advertisements? But, not being a newspaper proprietor, I am bound to admit that our system of advertising, in literature as in other things—but more especially in literature—strikes me as gigantically and foolishly wasteful. It is like firing volleys in the dark and without definite aim. For every bullet that finds its billet—for every advertisement that catches the eye predestined for it, and awakens a desire to buy and read—a thousand must go hopelessly astray and spend themselves in vain.

Mr. Heinemann. Oh, not quite so bad as that, I hope. In fact, advertisement—though the bad organisation of our book-trade forces us to rely too much upon it—is extraordinarily effective in selling a book. Of course no one who knows his business advertises at random. There is art in that, as in everything else. We may not aim at the individual reader, but we can aim pretty accurately at a class. Like our friends of yesterday, the gunners of the Scuola d'Artiglieria, we can calculate our range and drop our shells with tolerable precision, even over an "unseen target." Of course there is a great deal, too, in the choice of the weapon—the particular paper we select in order to get at a particular section of the public.

W. A. Which has the greater influence on the

fortunes of a book—the reviews or the advertisements?

- Mr. Heinemann. The advertisements, most emphatically. The glory of reviewing is departed—it is not at all what it used to be. I don't mean to say that it is less able. I think, on the contrary, that the average ability of reviewers is steadily rising. But for some reason or other the review has ceased to bite on the public mind as it used to. The days are past when a single article in the Times or the Spectator could make the fortune of a book. These romantic incidents don't occur now-a-days. Our reviewers are excellent critics, but for some reason or other they don't excite such interest in the books they deal with as the reviewers of the past seem to have excited.
- W. A. Is not that because no single paper is nowa-days regarded with the devout and childlike faith
 which the last generation used to accord to its two or
 three great oracles? But surely, though no individual
 paper may have the influence it once had, you must
 underrate the general influence of reviews on the sale
 of a book. For myself, though I am a little behind
 the scenes in reviewing, and know very well that
 reviewers are human and fallible, yet I am often influenced by a review either to buy a book or to order
 it at the library.
- Mr. Heinemann. Perhaps; but how much oftener do you feel that you have got out of a review all that you want to know about a book, and need not trouble about it any further? The function of the literary weekly, or the literary page of the daily paper, is largely to give people a superficial acquaintance with

current literature, while saving them the expense of book-buying and the time involved in book-reading. I really do not know why we publishers support—as we do, almost entirely—the literary weeklies. They are of no proportionate service to us, eithers as organs of criticism or as mediums of advertising—except, perhaps, those that are practically trade organs, in which capacity they fulfil some of the functions of the Buchhändler Börsenblatt.

- W. A. Then they are not the weapons you rely upon in bombarding the reading public?
- Mr. Heinemann. Most decidedly not. If they are effective organs of publicity at all, it is only in the case of a very special class of books. For getting at the great reading public, the popular newspaper is alone effective. But it is so effective that well-directed advertising will often counteract the harm done by the most damaging review, even in the most influential paper—I mean, of course, if the book has any real element of attraction in it.
- W. A. But reviews, I presume, are useful for quoting in advertisements?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, that is effective, if skilfully
- W. A. Rather a large "if." I am often struck with what seems to me the extraordinary stupidity with which "Opinions of the Press" are selected.
- Mr. Heinemann. No doubt they are often carelessly compiled by unintelligent subordinates. But you must remember, too, that in the case of many books they are intended to appeal to readers of a very different class from yourself. You are, as you say, behind the scenes,

and consequently in a position to discount a good deal that the man in the street will take for gospel.

W. A. Tell me, then, about the man in the street. As you take, on the whole, a hopeful view of the booktrade, I suppose I may assume that you think the average intelligence of the man in the street is looking up?

Mr. Heinemann. I don't know that that assumption is quite logical. Improvement in the book-trade would not necessarily imply improvement in public intelligence. There is an unintelligent as well as an intelligent reading public, and it might quite well happen that the book-trade was flourishing mainly through its appeal to the lower, and not the higher, class. But, as a matter of fact, I don't think this is the case. The intelligence of the middle and lower-middle classes, in the matter of book-buying, is on the whole improving. I don't know that I can say as much for the wealthier classes. Many a man, where his father would have spent a pound in books, will now spend a guinea on an opera stall, and sixpence—or fourpence-halfpenny—on a magazine.

W. A. I fancy the fashion of collecting books—forming libraries of handsome, well-bound editions—has gone out a good deal.

Mr. Heinemann. Yes; but, on the other hand, people of moderate means have now much more encouragement than they had a generation ago to form their own little libraries. Look how execrable was the manufacture of books during all the middle years of last century—from the days of the Pickerings down to our own times! A reasonably attractive edition of a classical

author was scarcely to be had for love or money. Now -within the last fifteen years or so-the improvement has been enormous. Dent, Grant Richards, and other publishers have done excellent service to literature and to the book-trade by their delightful editions of the classics. I can speak without egoism on this subject, for I have done nothing myself in the way of classical reprints: the literature of the day has always interested me more. But I greatly value the work done by others in this direction. It is not only good in itself -it helps current literature as well, by enabling people, at a reasonable expenditure, to form the nucleus of a handsome and attractive private library. Though I'm afraid I must admit that a good many people buy the Shakespeares and Scotts and Macaulays, with which the press teems, rather as furniture than as literature.

- W. A. Like the lady who always bought books that were bound in red—it was such a nice warm colour for a room.
- Mr. Heinemann. No doubt some such motive prevails in some cases. But books, after all, are a heavy and expensive form of wall-paper. I think we may take it that most book-buyers buy to read; and I believe that the number who buy intelligently to read intelligently is increasing year by year.
- W. A. It is pleasant to hear any one, in these days, talking optimistically. What do you say, then, to the sixpenny edition—the book that is bought to be skimmed and thrown away? You are not one of those who think that it is ruining literature?
 - Mr. Heinemann. The sixpenny edition this is

nothing new I am telling you—is simply the publishers' measure of self-defence against the cheap magazine. It ranks with periodicals rather than with books. The work published in sixpenny editions is probably, on the average, better than the matter supplied in the cheap magazines; and anything that tends to beget and foster the habit of reading—be it sixpenny editions, circulating libraries, public libraries, or what not—is in the long run good. The reading habit is like the opium habit: once acquired, it cannot be shaken off.

W. A. I'm afraid that, as regards the literature of snippets, your simile is only too just. It is a narcotic to thought, an opiate to intelligence. For my part, I welcome the sixpenny edition, because it seems to me that it must in some measure compete, not only with the cheap magazine, but with the penny patchwork and halfpenny rag-bag. Any reading that requires a continuous effort of attention is better than the idle nibbling at odds and ends that passes for reading with so many people. But you don't think, then, that the sixpenny reprint is cutting into the sale of the new sixshilling novel—that people who would formerly have given four-and-sixpence for a book are now content to wait a year or two, till they can get it for fourpence-halfpenny?

Mr. Heinemann. I don't think the fourpence-half-penny buyer and the four-and-sixpenny buyer belong to the same class at all. I don't know any one who buys sixpenny editions. For myself, I should as soon think of buying Tit-Bits or Answers as a sixpenny novel.

W. A. Well now, I am not at all above the sixpenny

reprint. In starting on a railway journey, I have often bought a sixpenny Stevenson or Hardy.

Mr. Heinemann. Yes, but would you have bought a six-shilling novel if there had been no sixpenny one to buy? Probably you wouldn't—you would have bought a two-shilling "railway novel," as it used to be called. That is what the sixpenny reprint has done—it has killed the old yellow-back. At the same time, I admit there has of late been a falling off in the average sale of the six-shilling book. It's impossible to say that it is not partly due to the sixpenny reprint; but I think it is much more probably to be traced to over-production and to the war.

W. A. Do you find that the average life of a book—even of a successful book—is falling off?

Mr. Heinemann. Most certainly it is. If you come to think of it, how could it be otherwise? We live so much faster, year by year; and the claims on our attention are so increasingly numerous and urgent. Even within my own experience of eighteen years or so, I find one book elbow another out much more rapidly than it used to.

W. A. Then does a successful book live an intenser life in the short span allotted to it?

Mr. Heinemann. Intenser? Well, I don't know how you would measure intensity. But, of course, there is always a steadily-growing public to appeal to—not only owing to actual increase of population, bu owing to the spread of education. Remember, it is only a little over thirty years since the first Education Act was passed.

W. A. Then, apart from temporary disturbances of

the market, such as that caused by the war, should you say that the average sale of a successful novel was greater to-day than it used to be twenty years ago?

- Mr. Heinemann. The comparison is very difficult to make, for in those days, of course, the three-volume novel, costing nominally a guinea and a half, held the field. But I think one may say with tolerable confidence that a successful novel has now-a-days far more readers in the first three or four months of its life than it had then.
- W. A. If, then, there is small hope of longevity for a modern book, does that affect your policy in the choice of matter for publication? Since the percentage of books that can be expected to make a permanent success is small and becoming smaller, do you relinquish the search for such books, and look out rather for those that are likely to make a temporary sensation before they sink into oblivion—pamphlet-books, or, as Ruskin used to say, mere supplements to the daily newspaper?
- Mr. Heinemann. Oh no; that would be the most short-sighted policy. Every publisher will tell you that the books he really wants are what the French call livres de fond—books that are in steady, continuous demand.
- W. A. And even among novels such books are still to be found, eh? Now, without going into individual instances, or in any way trespassing on delicate ground, what sort of novel commands the largest and steadiest sale?
 - Mr. Heinemann. Without doubt the story-the

well-told story. From the point of view of enduring popularity, give me the writer who can "spin a good yarn." Look, for instance, at the steady vogue of Miss Braddon! The smart society novel, and the moral or religious tract, may set people talking for a month or so, and have a large sale; but they very soon drop out and are forgotten.

W. A. And can you tell me if this shortness of life is characteristic of the American novel as well? One hears every day of gigantic "booms" in American fiction: does one novel drive out its predecessor, there as here? Or is there any novelist there who is establishing a permanent popularity, like that of Dickens or Thackeray, or even of our second-rate nineteenth-century men, Reade, Kingsley, or Trollope?

Mr. Heinemann. I don't hear of any—I wish I did. Many of their huge sucesses, especially in so-called historical romance, are even worse trash than the things the public devours on this side.

W. A. Do you take the same encouraging view of the American book-trade that you do of the English? I presume the conditions are very similar.

Mr. Heinemann. Well, the American publishers have one great disadvantage to contend against, and one great advantage on their side. The disadvantage lies in the fact that so much of the retail trade has fallen into the hands of the enormously powerful department stores, where you can buy everything, from a shoelace to an edition of Horace.

W. A. I see. You mean that the intervention of these stores—Wanamaker's, Marshall Field's, and so forth—prevents the development of a class of skilled

specialists in bookselling, such as you think we shall one day have in England.

- Mr. Heinemann. Yes. It is certainly not to the advantage of literature that it should reach the public through the medium of the dry goods store. Spare me the obvious pun.
- W. A. Well, then, what is the great advantage that the American publisher enjoys?
- Mr. Heinemann. The power of getting direct at a very large public without the intervention of the bookseller at all, through the medium of a properly-organised Post Office. Do you realise that books and magazines can go through the post in America for one cent a pound, in place of our fourpence, or eight cents, a pound? American publishers do an immense business in this way.
- W. A. But a man must hear of a book before he can order it to be posted to him. How do the publishers get at their postal customers? Through circulars? Newspaper advertisements?
- Mr. Heinemann. Partly; but especially through the magazines, which are splendid advertising mediums. Do you know why the Americans have half-a-dozen first-rate illustrated magazines, while we have only one—the Pall Mall? It is simply because of the facilities for distribution offered by the Post Office. I can tell you we stand greatly in need of another Rowland Hill here in England; but I suppose that sort of man comes only once in a century. Our magazines, such as they are, get at the public through six thousand retailers, and Smith and Son's seven hundred and eighty bookstalls. Now, why should not the profits

of this mechanism of distribution go into the nation's exchequer?

- W. A If Wells's Anticipations are correct, we are bound to have great postal reforms before long. But do you mean to say that this one-cent rate actually pays the American Postal Department?
- Mr. Heinemann. I can't give you figures on the point; but clearly it wouldn't be continued if it involved a loss. And if it simply covers expenses in America, it could not fail to bring in a large profit in England, where the distances are so much shorter. But, speaking of the American book-market, there is another point that must not be overlooked—the enormous success of the subscription edition.
- W. A. The subscription edition? What does that mean precisely?
- Mr. Heinemann. Why, the special edition of standard books and sets of books, got up to be sold by travelling canvassers.
- W. A. I know the book-agent is a stock figure in the repertory of the American humorist. So he is really a success, is he?
- Mr. Heinemann. Undoubtedly. In thousands and thousands of American houses, especially in country districts, you will find quite a handsome little library bought from the travelling agents.
- W. A. And do the leading publishers sell books in this way?
- Mr. Heinemann. Indeed they do. But not the same editions as they put on the general market. There is always something special about the subscription edition—superior illustrations, or binding, or both.

- W. A. Is not the method we have heard so much of recently—the method of selling enormously-advertised sets of books on the instalment principle—simply a development of the American "subscription" method?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, it is; and it might have been a very valuable development, only that, unfortunately, it was discounted by being applied in the first instance to a set of books that nobody really wanted.
- W. A. The Encyclopædia Britannica! Do you mean to say that all that gigantic advertising was not successful?
- Mr. Heinemann. Successful in selling the books? Oh yes. I have no special information, but I have every reason to believe it was enormously successful. What I mean is that, when people had got the books, they found they were out of date. Compare the twenty-years-old Encyclopædia Britannica, for instance, with Brockhaus's great Conversations Lexikon, which is reprinted and brought up to date every year!
 - W. A. What! Every year?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, it runs to sixteen volumes in all, and four volumes are reprinted every three months.
- W. A. But you think that if the method of mammoth advertisement were applied to well-chosen publications, it would establish itself in popular favour and do good service?
- Mr. Heinemann. Yes, I think the method sound. And now, if we are to catch the afternoon train for Frascati, I think we had better go in and see about lunch.
- W. A. One moment more. I see you have lately been engaged in a controversy on the subject of the

literary agent. What, in your view, is the head and front of his offending?

- Mr. Heinemann. Oh, I have no special objection to an author's employing an agent, if he thinks it worth while to do so; only I don't see where the advantage comes in. It seems to me that he pays a very long price for a very small service, and often for no service at all.
- W. A. But if the author happens to be wholly incompetent in matters of business, it is surely worth his while to pay for expert assistance. There are people—not mere Harold Skimpoles in other respects, I hope—to whom figures convey no meaning whatever. They can no more interpret a publisher's contract than they can an Oscan inscription. If such people have to make their livelihood by selling the books they write, is it not reasonable and natural that they should call in expert assistance?
- Mr. Heinemann. By all means: let them employ a solicitor to look after their business interests.
- W. A. But then, a solicitor who has acquired experience of this class of business will become, to all intents and purposes, a literary agent.
- Mr. Heinemann. With this fundamental difference, that the solicitor will transact your business for a stated fee, whereas the literary agent claims a percentage on your profits. It passes my comprehension how any author of the smallest standing can think it to his interest to pay an income-tax of ten per cent., and sometimes fifteen per cent., to his literary agent. A solicitor would do for five pounds all that an agent does for fifty.

W. A. But what about an agent's special knowledge of the market — where to "place" a book to best advantage, and so forth?

Mr. Heinemann. I assure you that is all nonsense. It must be a very unintelligent author indeed who does not know all that need be known about the market. Remember, I am speaking of the market for books; as regards the "serialising" or "syndicating" of literary matter, the case is different. There, I admit, the agent has his uses; and perhaps in the case of an author living at a great distance from his market—in America or Australia. But come along now, or we shall really be late. We can resume the discussion this afternoon, if you like, at "Tusculum, beautiful Tusculum."

W. A. I wonder if Cicero employed a literary agent?

Mr. Heinemann. Not he! He was far too good a man of business.

[Execut ambo.

December, 1901.



To face p. 197.

MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER.

From a photograph by Langdér, Ltd., Glasgow.

Conversation X. With Mr. George Alexander.

Scene I.: A high-lying common in Hertfordshire. Time: An afternoon in early spring. Enter the Dramatis Personee, strolling.

W. A. Ah! you have golf links at your door, I see.

Mr. Alexander. Yes, that is what brings me here.

Do you play?

W. A. No; I've scarcely touched a club since I was a boy; and then I hated the game.

Mr. Alexander. I am devoted to all outdoor games. Over the hedge there you can see my croquet-ground. Shall we have a game?

W. A. No, thank you: I used to like croquet when it was a sport and not a science; but now——

Mr. Alexander. It's true that until you have watched an expert you have no idea how much play there is in the game. I have a neighbour here who is a first-rate hand at it. He plans a game as a general plans—or ought to plan—a campaign, with consummate strategical foresight and tactical finesse. But, after all, give me golf! It is sport and exercise in one. There is nothing like it for keeping your brain clear and your body fit.

W. A. Do you play indoor games as well? Chess?

Mr. Alexander. I am very little of a card-player. I had to learn bridge for the opening scene of Haddon Chambers's play,—The Awakening.

W. A. Do you mean to say that you really played the game on the stage?

Mr. Alexander. Certainly we did. In that case, as in so many others, the easiest way to produce the effect was to do the thing. But that is almost my sole experience as a bridge-player.

W. A. I suppose you find theatrical management all

you require in the way of gambling?

- Mr. Alexander. Well, now, if you don't mind my saying so, I call that rather a superficial view to take of the matter. I know it's an accepted commonplace to call management a great lottery, with few prizes and many blanks. But how is it that one man will draw a whole series of prizes, broken by scarcely a single blank, while another will draw nothing but blank upon blank to all eternity? Don't tell me it is mere luck—"a run on the red" or "a run on the black." No, no! Theatrical management is a game we all play under heavy, and sometimes crushing, disadvantages; but it is a game of skill, if ever there was one. Cricket doesn't become a mere gamble because it happens to be played on a heavy wicket, where rungetting is slow and difficult.
- W. A. But does success follow any one man so faithfully as you say? It seems to me we have seen notable instances to the contrary.
- Mr. Alexander. There may have been instances in which men, after playing the game skilfully for a long time, have lost their skill and their nerve and come to grief. But I know of no case in which a man who has the skill and nerve required for management has failed simply because he was dogged by misfortune. What

people call "luck" is knowledge, instinct, organising capacity. For instance, who is the luckiest manager in London at present?

W. A. The luckiest? Why, I suppose it is Mr. George Edwardes.

Mr. Alexander. Just so. But George Edwardes's luck is nothing but genius. He is a superb organiser and stage-manager. The class of work he does may not greatly interest you and me: but, such as it is, he does it to perfection. Actors who have worked under him have told me again and again of his unerring instinct as a stage-manager; and you know how admirably, after its kind, he puts on the stage everything he undertakes. I assure you that management to George Edwardes is like croquet to the champion player I was telling you about—it is not merely a game of skill, but a science.

W. A. Well now, to pass from George Edwardes to George Alexander, and to put a home question—have not you had your ups and downs of luck, your runs on the red and your runs on the black?

Mr. Alexander. Of course I have had more successful and less successful productions. One does not find a Tanqueray or a Zenda every day. But a play may be neither one nor the other, and yet very fairly remunerative. Again and again my friends in the press have been good enough to condole with me over a "failure" which, as a matter of fact, was nothing of the sort. I don't wear my box-office returns on my sleeve for paragraphists to peck at; and whenever they see that a play does not run for at least a hundred nights, they

promptly guess that it is a failure. But the fact is that a manager who knows his business, and spends his money judiciously, can do very well with a much shorter run than a hundred nights.

W. A. It depends on the class of play, I suppose?

Mr. Alexander. Of course, of course; and I don't mean to say that I have never spent more money on a production than it would stand. And then, too, there is a certain element of pure chance in outside influences, such as weather, war, depression of trade, illness, and so forth. I don't pretend that any one can be infallible, or that luck does not enter at all into theatrical affairs, just as it does into every other business. What I mean is that insight, nerve and skill are far more important factors than luck, and will always correct it in the long run.

W. A. But you admit that the game of theatrical management is played under great disadvantages. I quite agree; but I wonder whether the disadvantages that you and I have in mind are the same. Let me have your list.

Mr. Alexander. Well, I scarcely know where to begin. We have just been talking of one serious disadvantage—the conviction people have got into their heads that there is no such thing as a moderate success. It is rather annoying, when you have come out of a season with a handsome profit, to find yourself written down a failure because you have produced three plays instead of one. During my career as a manager at the St. James's, I've never had a year which, on the whole, has not shown a sound profit.

- W. A. No doubt this hundred-night superstition is annoying; but you would scarcely call it seriously detrimental?
- Mr. Alexander. It is more so than you would think. People are always greatly influenced by the idea that a theatre is "in luck," or out of it. The public certainly does its best to make management a gamble.
- W. A. The truth is, the public does not think and discriminate with reference to its theatrical entertainments. It will only flock mechanically in this direction or in that. As Macready used to say, the only way to induce people to come to the theatre is to persuade them that there is no chance of their getting in. Now let us have the second drawback on your list.
- Mr. Alexander. The second ought to have been the first in point of importance. For one reason or another, theatrical speculation has such attraction for all sorts of people that they are always rushing into it without the faintest reasonable prospect of success, and overstocking the market. The result is that, take it all round, the theatrical world is not really self-supporting—not solvent. You talk of the necessity for an "endowed theatre,"—let me tell you the theatre of to-day is extravagantly endowed, and endowed very much to the detriment of legitimate enterprise.
- W. A. There, again, I am altogether with you. It needs no genius to discover the economic fallacy of John Hollingshead's famous comparison of theatrical management to cheesemongering. If cheesemongering were such a fascinating occupation that people were

bent on selling cheeses at a dead loss rather than not sell them at all, then—and not otherwise—his analogy would hold good.

- Mr. Alexander. That is scarcely an accurate way of putting it. Of course nobody wants to sell at a loss. The chief motive (among others, less avowable) that makes your outside speculator anxious to "do a flutter" in theatres, is his idea that great hauls are to be made with comparatively trifling stakes. He knows how So-and-so, who put £200 into such-and-such a farce, cleared twenty thousand in a couple of years—and that fires his imagination.
- W. A. In fact, as I hinted at the outset, the theatre is like the racecourse and the roulette-table—a sort of side-show to the Stock Exchange, enabling people whose life-work is gambling to gamble even in their leisure moments.
- Mr. Alexander. Oh, I never denied that to the amateur financier theatrical speculation is simply a lottery. What I maintained and maintain is that legitimate management, if I may call it so, is a game of skill, into which chance enters very little.
- W. A. But, even for the legitimate manager, does not the influence of the financier often make difficulties, forcing his hand here, checking it there, and introducing divided counsels where unity of view and purpose is essential?
- Mr. Alexander. I can't speak for others, but for myself I can say without hesitation that what success I have attained has been due to my being entirely my own master in my theatre. I know what I want, and

I do it, with no one to say me nay. To give you a small instance—I think you were one of the critics who praised the mounting of *Paolo and Francesca?*

W. A. Certainly I was—I thought it admirable from first to last.

Mr. Alexander. Well, if I had had to keep the fear of a syndicate before my eyes, it would not have been anything like what it is. It represents an outlay far greater even than the actual cost of what you see on the stage; for whenever a scene or accessory was not judged satisfactory, it was simply cancelled and made over again, until we got it right. I have not the least doubt that this labour and expense was justified, even from a purely business point of view, in so far as it contributed to the general success of the production; but do you think a syndicate would have seen it in that light?

W. A. Never having been either a manager or a "syndic," I cannot tell. All I can say is that your mounting was every bit as complete as D'Annunzio's, and to my thinking even more beautiful. I hope he may one day see it. But now for the other disadvantages that a manager has to contend with.

Mr. Alexander. What was the last one we spoke of?
W. A. The competition of practically insolvent theatrical enterprises.

Mr. Alexander. Oh yes. Well, in addition to that there is the competition of the music-halls. Don't you think that the public is becoming more and more impatient of anything serious in the theatre, and running more and more after the variety-shows?

W. A. More and more-since when?

Mr. Alexander. Why, since seven or eight years ago. W. A. No; there I don't at all agree with you-I think that is a constantly recurrent illusion. At any

rate. I remember quite distinctly that seven or eight years ago people were saving exactly the same thing. For instance, with a little trouble, I could give you chapter and verse for a remark of Pinero's to the effect that the Ibsen movement of the early 'nineties had so refined people's taste that they now went for their intellectual recreations to the Empire Theatre of Varieties. According to my reading of the case, there was a great music-hall "boom" some fifteen or sixteen years ago-away back in the 'eighties-and since then the popularity of the variety-show has not notably increased. So far as I can see, there is every reason for thinking that the theatre is more than holding its own against the halls.

Mr. Alexander. Do you think, then, that a serious play is as likely to make a great success now as it was

eight years ago?

W. A. I see-you are comparing the run of The Second Mrs. Tanqueray with the much shorter run of some more recent serious plays, of equally striking merit.

Mr. Alexander. Suppose I was-how do you account for the difference?

W. A. Easily enough. Mrs. Tanqueray made an immense sensation because it was such a stride in advance of anything we had seen previously on the English stage. A serious social play is not now such a startling novelty as it was then. But the main fact is -is it not?-that the average run of a successful play

of almost any sort is shorter now than it was eight or ten years ago.

Mr. Alexander. You are simply re-stating my point in other words. How do you account for this shrinkage in the average length of runs, if not through the drawing-off of the public by the music-halls?

W. A. What about the suburban theatres? Surely you forget them. And you forget another factor in the problem—the most important of all, I fancy.

Mr. Alexander. What is that?

W. A. Why, the man we were talking of ten minutes ago—Mr. George Edwardes. In the early 'nineties his reign was barely beginning. And what was the competition of the old burlesque compared with that of "musical comedy"?

Mr. Alexander. Again, I say, you are re-stating my point. When I spoke of the competition of the musichalls, I was not weighing my words, or insisting on the purely technical distinction between a variety-show where they smoke and a variety-show where they don't. George Edwardes is a master organiser of both classes of entertainment; and both classes of entertainment have, I assure you, taken a hold on the public which adds seriously to the difficulties of the situation, so far as the non-musical and non-spectacular drama is concerned. But here we are at the cottage. Come in and have some lunch, and we can resume our talk afterwards.

Scene II.: A cottage drawing-room. A bright fire. Cigarettes.

Mr. Alexander. I see you have been taking part in the periodical discussion of a National Theatre, or a Municipal Theatre, or whatever you call it.

- W. A. Suppose we say of theatrical endowment as a whole.
- Mr. Alexander. Very well. Do you really think there is the remotest chance of anything practical being done in that direction?
- W. A. Beware of setting me off upon my hobby. It's an interminable subject, if you once get started upon it.
- Mr. Alexander. But I am genuinely curious to know where you expect anything in the shape of endowment to come from, and what you propose to do with it. Understand me—I have no hostility to the principle of the thing. I should be very glad to believe in it if I could. Only I don't see how you are going to work it.
- W. A. In the first place, before we come to that question, surely you admit the desirability—not to say the necessity—of doing something to place the theatre on a sounder basis than it at present rests upon? You have just been telling me of the difficulties a London manager has to contend with. Are things any better in the provinces?
- Mr. Alexander. They are a great deal worse. The majority of the country theatres live wholly upon their Christmas pantomime. The manager of a group of important theatres in big provincial cities told me the other day that it would pay him to close his theatres entirely from the end of one pantomime season to the beginning of the next.
- W. A. Yet assuredly the provincial theatres don't alienate their public by flying too high. One has only to pick up a theatrical paper and look at the list of

companies "On the Road" to realise the hopeless vulgarity and blatant imbecility of nine-tenths of the theatrical fare that is offered to the provincial public. A glance at the posters on the hoardings in any provincial town is enough to make one feel suicidal.

Mr. Alexander. I fancy the reason of that is that the better class of people in the provinces have got into the habit of doing the greater part of their theatre-going in London. I ought to be the last to complain of this—except when I am in the provinces.

W. A. Yet, from what you were saying this morning, it appears the country's loss is in no sense London's gain. So far as I can make out, no one seems to benefit by the existing state of affairs—except Mr. George Edwardes. This is the pass in which our vaunted supply-and-demand system has landed us.

Mr. Alexander. Your idea, then, is to supply plays for which there is no demand?

W. A. My dear sir, there never is any active demand for any particular form of art. The supply always precedes the demand. Do you suppose your public "demanded" The Second Mrs. Tanqueray? Do you think that before Pinero wrote it and you produced it, people had been going about with an insatiate craving in their hearts, saying to each other, "Who shall give us a tragic character-study in modern dress?" Not a bit of it. Pinero and you wanted to do a fine thing—the demand was in your artistic instinct and nowhere else. You did it,—you did a fine thing finely,—and the supply created the demand.

Mr. Alexander. Surely there is a fallacy in that argument. People may not definitely know what they

want—may not be able to put it into words. But a demand must exist vaguely, inarticulately——

W. A. Say potentially.

Mr. Alexander. — before supply can, so to speak, bring it to a head. The man who succeeds is the man who divines the unformulated, unconscious demand of the public, and sets about supplying it.

W. A. Quite true; and what we want is a mechanism, such as every other country north of the Alps and Pyrenees possesses, to enable us to awaken the unformulated, half-conscious demand on the part of the public for the higher forms of theatrical recreation. You don't mean to tell me, do you, that the British public is so hopelessly inferior to the French or German public in intelligence as to be incapable of appreciating what is best in its own dramatic literature, classical and modern?

Mr. Alexander. I don't know about that. All I know is that the British public is firmly convinced that the drama has got to pay its own way, and that I don't see who is going to relieve it of that necessity.

W. A. But you know as well as I do—what else have you just been telling me?—that this idea of the drama paying its own way is a sheer superstition, which doesn't in the least represent the facts of the case. If the drama really paid its way, how many theatres would be open this evening in London?

Mr. Alexander. I give it up. Ask me another.

W. A. The plain fact is, as you yourself put it, that the drama is lavishly endowed; but the endowment takes the form of stupid underpinning of base entertainments instead of intelligent support for what

is fine and ennobling. The English drama of the past, so far as London is concerned, exists only in the shape of a few spectacular revivals; while in the country it drags out a poverty-stricken existence in third-rate performances at minor theatres. And meanwhile the modern, living drama, which you have done so much to advance—the first approach to a dramatic literature that we have had for more than a centuryis seriously threatened by the insensate long-run system, under which every play is branded as a failure that doesn't attain to at least a hundred consecutive performances. Do you mean to tell me that there is no possible remedy for this state of things? Do you think it out of the question that the British nation should ever be got to take an intelligent interest in this potent and fascinating art of the theatre? Forgive my becoming rhetorical. The silliness of our helpless acquiescence in the present state of things exasperates one now and then.

Mr. Alexander. But you have not yet given me any definite, tangible idea of what you propose as a remedy for the state of things you denounce.

W. A. You have travelled in Germany?

Mr. Alexander. A little.

W. A. Well, you know how in every German town of the smallest importance the theatre is one of its most prominent buildings—often the chief architectural ornament of the place?

Mr. Alexander. Yes, so much I know; but as I have naturally been in Germany, for the most part, during the months when the theatres are closed, I have rather hazy notions as to what goes on inside them.

W. A. Very well: let me tell you. In these German theatres the whole dramatic literature of the world, you may say, from the Antigone to Charley's Aunt—or, to put it in rhyme, from the Edipus Rex to The Gay Lord Quex—is more or less adequately represented. The Germans play their own classics constantly—Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, etc. They play several plays of Molière, one or two of Calderon, one or two of Goldoni. Shakespeare they play more than any of their own classics except Schiller, and they keep alive upon the stage far more of his plays than we do.

Mr. Alexander. But do they act him well?

W. A. So far as my observation goes, I should saymoderately. They have good voices and know how to use them; but their prevailing method, I think, is a trifle stodgy. There is no doubt that, with the training repertory theatres would afford, we could easily beat them at that. Where the Germans shine is in modern character-acting; for, as of course you know, in addition to all they do for the classical drama, these theatres have produced an extremely rich and important modern dramatic literature, of realistic tendencies, with Sudermann and Hauptmann for its leaders. Then they play heaps of light comedies, like those we used to see in the Daly Company's repertory -for you must not suppose that the German theatres are museums of dramatic fossils or even relentlessly "high art" institutions. And, finally, they do many of the best modern French plays-Dumas, Sardou, Rostand, Donnay, Brieux-not adapted, but intelligently translated. Now, I fail to see why the English theatre should not be for England what the German theatre is for Germany—an instrument of culture and recreation combined.

- Mr. Alexander. You would have us play Goethe and Schiller currently, as the Germans play Shake-speare?
- W. A. No, no—don't misunderstand me. In that respect reciprocity is out of the question. Neither Goethe nor Schiller is, like Shakespeare, a dramatic world-genius that transcends all frontiers. And besides, we have not—no other nation has—the extraordinary receptivity of the Germans for foreign ideas and foreign art. I don't in the least want to imitate slavishly the German theatre. I want to see England create for herself a theatrical system as intelligently adapted to the special needs and conditions of Englishmen—of the English-speaking world—as the German theatrical system is to German needs and conditions.
- Mr. Alexander. But now comes the great question: What does all this cost? And who pays for it all?
- W. A. It costs, in the way of endowment, very much less than you might suppose. Roughly speaking, there are four classes of theatres in Germany: Court or State theatres, municipal theatres, subscription theatres, and lastly, private-enterprise theatres like our own. It is true that a few of the Court theatres (notably the Burgtheater at Vienna) are run at a very great cost; but these are not typical, nor are they the theatres where the best work is done. Many of the Court theatres, even, are quite economically run.
- Mr. Alexander. Of that I can give you one instance on the best authority. The late Duke of Saxe-Coburg—the Duke of Edinburgh, you know—told me that

his theatre at Coburg was run at a loss to him of fifteen hundred a year. Fifteen hundred, mark you—not thousand. I thought to myself, "If your Royal Highness can have the luxury of an ideal theatre for that sum, it is cheap at the money!"

W. A. The company is not a first-rate one, to judge by its performances at Drury Lane a few years ago; but it plays an excellent repertory. However, it is not the Court theatres that we really have to learn from. It is the municipal and subscription theatres, and especially the very common type of theatre which is partly municipal, partly subscription.

Mr. Alexander. What do you mean by that?

W. A. There are several different ways in which municipalities may, and do, co-operate with private subscribers in securing for a town a worthy theatre. Very commonly the building is erected by the subscriptions of public-spirited citizens on a site granted by the municipality.

Mr. Alexander. But even supposing the municipality does nothing more than grant a site, it takes the market value of that site out of the ratepayers' pockets.

W. A. Not precisely: because very often the site is part of a park or garden already devoted to public uses. It has no market value, because it cannot be put in the market. Some people might object that the public is robbed of so many square feet of flowerbeds or sward: but the Germans have the sense to see that the highest "public use" to which a plot of land can be put is that of supporting a truly educative and recreative theatre.

Mr. Alexander. Well, then, supposing the theatre

built, how is it run? Who manages it? And who bears the loss, when there is a loss?

- W. A. How goes the time? When must we start for town?
- Mr. Alexander. In half-an-hour—and you must have a cup of tea first.
- W. A. Well, then, I can't attempt to go into all the different ways in which municipal and subscription theatres are run in Germany. In exceptional cases the theatre is actually managed by a committee of the municipality. More often it is either given rentfree, or let at a very low figure, to a manager who runs it for his own profit and at his own risk, but must conform to a certain set of rules—a cahier des charges—and can be turned out on short notice if the work he does is not thought satisfactory.

Mr. Alexander. Then municipalities don't, as a rule, grant a fixed subsidy to the municipal theatre?

- W. A. Very rarely, I believe. You may take it, on the whole, that the municipal and subscription theatres, which are really the backbone of theatrical life in Germany and Austria, cost the ratepayers, as such, very little indeed. Court theatres apart, it is the public spirit of individual citizens which really "endows" the German drama—mainly by housing it in fine and commodious buildings, either rent free or at a trifling figure in comparison with our London rack-rents. I am very certain that the whole outlay of these public-spirited citizens is insignificant in comparison with the return they get in the shape both of personal gratification and of national advantage.
 - Mr. Alexander. Very likely that is so. But, disguise

it or minimise it as you may, the fact remains that these results are produced by people who think more of what they ought to give to the theatre than of what they can make out of it. Do you think such people exist in England? I never met them.

W. A. I think such people would be found to exist in plenty, if only their public spirit could be directed into the right channel.

Mr. Alexander. I know a good many men of great wealth and of influence in the City; but I can't imagine myself going to them and saying, "Look here, I want you to build me a handsome theatre, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly Circus, and to let me have it rent free on condition that I produce a high-art repertory!" I should like to see their faces when I made that modest proposition.

W. A. To that I reply, among other things, that the City financier is not the man to go to, and that, if he were, you are not the man to go to him.

Mr. Alexander. Why not? I am told I have a very good name in the City.

W. A. Precisely; you are a successful actor-manager. People go to your theatre to see you, not to see other people playing a repertory under your management. No actor, be he ever so versatile, can possibly appear in all the plays of a repertory.

Mr. Alexander. Appear in all the plays! I should think not! It's not a question of versatility, but of sheer time and strength. No human being who managed such a theatre could possibly act in it as well, except quite occasionally—once a week or so at the outside.

W. A. Well-and how should you like that?

Mr. Alexander. Like it? Why, it would suit me admirably. I thought you knew better than to imagine that it was the actor-manager's sole delight to wear a pretty moustache and pose in the centre of the stage.

W.A. I didn't imagine that precisely; but I do imagine—and you will scarcely persuade me to the contrary—that your "personal attraction" is a large element in your success. And that would of course be very greatly sacrificed in a theatre in which you

appeared only occasionally.

Mr. Alexander. My dear Archer, I have succeeded partly, as I said before, because I have been my own master, but mainly because I have loved my art (not acting only, but management), and have worked at it conscientiously, untiringly. So much I may say for myself. And I would willingly work for a Repertory Theatre—which, I admit, would be a great blessing in many ways—if I could feel it to be within the range of practical politics here in England. But now I have my own humble row to hoe, and must be off and work at that. But first let us have some tea. Come along!

[Execute ambo.]

April, 1902.

Conversation XI. With Mrs. Mary St. Leger Harrison (Lucas Malet).

Scene: Mrs. Harrison's library, in South Kensington. Time: A Winter afternoon.

Mrs. Harrison. So you take seriously the idea that the stories are all told, and that fiction will soon be an extinct art, like the profile-cutting of our grandmothers?

W. A. I don't take it very seriously—I let my mind play with it.

Mrs. Harrison. As a pleasing possibility?

W. A. Not as an altogether appalling one.

Mrs. Harrison. Do tell me—what are the symptoms of this approaching extinction of the novel? It was Jules Verne, was it not, who started the idea?

W. A. Who was the last to re-start it, rather.

Mrs. Harrison. Well, it seems to me exactly what one might expect from that quarter. It is like forecasting the end of the world through a swish from a comet's tail. The thing is possible, no doubt; but serious astronomers see nothing to point to its imminent probability. We have plenty of evidence that the telling of stories, and that the stories told, are a constant quantity in human history. Therefore, as there is nothing new under the sun, and as the only sound way of reasoning is to reason from the known to the unknown I imagine story-telling will remain a constant quantity. Man will want what man has



To face p. 216.

MRS. ST. LEGER HARRISON (LUCAS MALET).

From a photograph by Debenham & Gould, Bovynemouth.

wanted. And I am quite sure that many a woman before the Sultana Scheherazade has saved her neck by her talent for romancing.

W. A. In short, you define man as a lying animal, and think he—and she—will go on telling agreeable lies, at six shillings a tarradiddle, to the end of the chapter? Well, I am inclined to admit that fiction, considered as the art of lying, may probably count on a long lease of life. It is the fiction which aims at telling the truth that seems to me of doubtful longevity. The novel is clearly the best of all mechanisms for saying the thing that is not; but may it not come to be thought rather a clumsy device for portraying the thing that is?

Mrs. Harrison. You mean that romance is immortal, but that realism will soon have worked itself out?

W. A. Say, rather, that realism tends to become merged in science, that people may one day prefer to take their psychology and sociology "neat," so to speak, with no hot water and sugar of sentimental or sensational narrative to help it down.

Mrs. Harrison. Now, if I wanted to prophesy—I don't, but you have lured me on—I should take exactly the opposite line from yours. I should suggest that the romances had all been told—that people who want picturesque adventure and reconstructions of bygone times would find all they can possibly require in Scott and Dumas and Stevenson and the rest—in The Cloister and the Hearth, and Esmond, and A Tale of Two Cities—

W. A. May I add Hypatia and Westward Ho?

Mrs. Harrison. — while every generation, every

great community, every new phase of political and economic development, will want its Balzac, its Flaubert, its Zola, its Meredith, and Hardy—if only it can find them.

W. A. You don't think, then, that each generation will want to create its own Eldorados, and Ruritanias, and Castles East of the Sun and West of the Moon?

Mrs. Harrison. Oh yes, they will, I dare say; and no doubt the march of science will have its campfollowers, like Jules Verne, to fable about airships and submarines and what not. But I doubt whether these things will hold the literary rank in future that they have held in the past. We are talking—are we not? of literature as it is understood by educated, intelligent people, not of the mere stacks of "reading matter" that are put on the market to supply the day's demand, just as so many tons of meat are delivered every morning at Smithfield. I can't help thinking that the intelligent public of the coming time will go to the past for its romances of adventure and archæology. and will demand of contemporary men of genius studies, interpretations, and criticisms of contemporary life.

W. A. No doubt, no doubt: the question is whether these studies, interpretations, and criticisms will take the form of what we now understand as fiction.

Mrs. Harrison. The form—the formula—will of course change. Dickens doesn't write like Fielding, Hardy doesn't write like Dickens, and the Hardy of the next generation will not write like our Hardy,—that is obvious. But that he will write fiction in one

form or another, and not sociological treatises or psychological monographs, I don't for an instant doubt. You surely do not suppose, Mr. Archer, that science can ever supplant art with the multitude, any more than it can supplant religion, of which art is merely another expression? The eye can see things that the microscope misses, and the films of the brain are still more sensitive than those of the camera.

- W. A. Aristotle says, somewhere or other, that poetry is more philosophical than history; in the same way you would have me think that fiction is truer than science.
- Mrs. Harrison. It can place some aspects of truth in a stronger, more convincing light; and it can bring truth home not only to the intellect, as science can, but —which is much more important—to the heart as well.
- W. A. What do you mean by truth in this context? Moral truth or objective truth, so to speak? The truth of the fable or the truth of the photograph?
- Mrs. Harrison. Surely you don't put that question seriously?
- W. A. I admit I was beguiled by alliteration into a misleading image. Of course we are not speaking of unselective mechanical truth, like that of photography. Let me correct the illustration and ask whether the truth that, according to you, fiction brings home to the sympathies is truth of the lesson or truth of the picture?
- Mrs. Harrison. But again I say, how can you ask? Is not the one entirely dependent on the other? How can the lesson be true if the picture be untrue? And,

indeed, what have we, as artists, to do with the lesson? Let us make the picture true, and the lesson will take care of itself. A novel should be simply an enlargement of the reader's experience, a focussing of life as a whole, subject to certain conditions of time and place. It should be a "holding of the mirror up to nature"precisely that! And the profit the reader should desire from it should not merely be the instinctive, the halfunconscious profit all reasonable persons desire from their experiences, but the philosophic profit we gain whenever we see any life as a whole—that is, in a sane and true relation to all life. But this is just where the difficulty of the English novelist comes in. Puritanism is so stupidly afraid of the lessons of life as a whole, and so resolute never to learn them, that it insists on our wearing, or pretending to wear, blinkers, so as to see nothing that is inconsistent with its preconceived moral scheme. Think of the weakness, the unphilosophic quality of Puritanism, compared with Catholicism, as a basis or background for art! And then the eventual outcome of Puritanism is of necessity rationalism; and there we have the real enemy! Suppose a novelist with the genius of Balzac were to appear on the scene to-morrow-what sort of a Balzac would he be after adapting himself to the standards of the British publisher, the British reviewer, and the British public?

W. A. It would be a hard case, no doubt; but let us be just to Puritanism and admit——

Mrs. Harrison. Surely you do not deny that the Puritan is inimical to art?

W. A. Theoretically, I don't; but so far as fiction is

concerned (the stage is another matter) I doubt his power, in these latter days, to do very much harm. However, that is not what I was going to say. The point I had in mind was this: if Puritanism places certain external hindrances in the English novelist's way, is there not ample compensation in the magnificent artistic material it affords him? What tragedies are so profound as those that, directly or indirectly, arise out of Puritanism,—personal tragedies, family tragedies, even, as we have seen, political tragedies? It seems to me that, whatever the limitations of our English fiction, there is an intensity in the soul-struggles it presents which one misses in even the best French fiction.

Mrs. Harrison. That is because the Englishman is much more certain that he has a soul.

W. A. Precisely—and what a tragic conviction! Don't we see, in Hamlet's great soliloquy, how it is not till he reminds himself of his soul that he feels himself truly in the grip of destiny? And then, what is the correlative of "soul"? Why, "sin"! What an infinitely stronger word than "péché"! The connotation is wholly different—just as "remorse" is a wholly different thing from "des remords." If I may take an example which ought to come home to you, what French novelist could write of The Wages of Sin? He would have to say, or at any rate to mean, nothing more tragic than The Consequences of Error.

Mrs. Harrison. But what can be more tragic than that? And what else do you and I mean when we say, The Wages of Sin?

W. A. Pardon me! You and I, by a conscious

effort, may water down The Wages of Sin into The Consequences of Error; but the colour of the thought is washed out in the process. Would The Consequences of Error have inspired you with the novel we know? Is it not precisely the ingrained, ineradicable Puritanism lurking in James Colthurst, as in every normal Englishman, that makes him such a tragic figure? And is it not the Puritanism in the blood of your readers—whatever may be their conduct or their convictions—that enables them to sympathise with his agonies?

Mrs. Harrison. All this amounts to saying—does it not?—that Puritanism allows us to be more melodramatic in our morality than our neighbours are. We study our ethical problems, not in plain, sane daylight, but in the glare of the flames of Gehenna. If you alleged this as an accusation, I am not sure that I could deny it: but I understand you to rank the flare from the pit as the chief of our advantages.

W. A. I can't quite accept your metaphor. I think the Puritan conception of sin is not melodramatic, but tragic—all the more so if we hold it to be morbid and erroneous. Suppose we change the metaphor and say of the English novelist, not that he can burn red fire, but that he can raise ghosts to haunt his heroes, such as are not dreamt of in the Frenchman's philosophy. And are not ghosts part of the classic apparatus of tragedy? When the ghosts are all laid, when man shall have got into moral harmony with nature, then indeed will fiction be in a parlous case.

Mrs. Harrison. Ah, well, if it survives till then it will last my time, and a little over. All you have said,

it seems to me, amounts simply to this, that Calvinism supplies us with darker colours for our palette than any religion which allows us to find, as Tartuffe says, "avec le ciel des accommodements." Perhaps that is so; but how small a set-off against the warping and stunting influence of Puritanism upon art. Do you think that Balzac, had he been offered the choice, would have exchanged his magnificent breadth of outlook and freedom of utterance for the chance of studying a particular variety of subjective self-torture?

W. A. I believe I might find an answer even to that; but the fact is, in trying to make a case for Puritanism I am appearing in a new and entirely unrehearsed character—a good deal to my own surprise. Does it ever happen to you, in a dream, to find yourself on the stage of a theatre, with the curtain just going up, and suddenly to realise that you don't know a word of your part?

Mrs. Harrison. I don't think my waking mind runs so much on the theatre as to render me liable to such nightmares.

W. A. Dear me! I thought all novelists dreamed of nothing but the stage.

Mrs. Harrison. Not I, I am afraid.

W. A. Yet, if you will allow me to say so, in one at least of your books you have all the materials for a very fine play.

Mrs. Harrison. In which? You are not going to tell me that there is a play in Sir Richard Calmady! I have had an application from America for the right to dramatise the book; but of course I regarded it as a physical impossibility. Whom could they get to

play the leading part? A "freak" from Barnum's show?

- W. A. No, I was not thinking of Sir Richard Calmady. It was The Carissima I had in mind.
- Mrs. Harrison. Ah, I confess I have thought that a play might be made of that story, and have even attempted it. But when you say there is "all the material" for a play in it, you understate the case. There is so very much more than the material for a play in it; and the parts that would lend themselves to treatment on the stage would certainly not be the best parts.
- W. A. I expressed myself badly in saying there was the "material" for a play in it. I should rather have said that it contains the germ, the seed, the rootidea, of a very fine play. It would be a mistake to attempt simply to hew and chisel a play out of the book as it stands, as a statue is hewn out of a block of marble. You would have, as it were, to replant the idea in your mind and let it grow afresh in dramatic form. Neither the characters nor the incidents would be quite the same. You would have to sacrifice a good deal of subtlety; but, on the other hand, you could attain some, not only strong, but really subtle, effects of a different order.
- Mrs. Harrison. But surely I am the very last person that could be expected to do all this. If the book has any merit at all, the characters must be real, at any rate to me; their doings cannot be arbitrary, but must spring from what seems, to me at least, an inward necessity. How, then, should I be able to "hatch them over again and hatch them different"?

W. A. Well, I am myself no enthusiast for the dramatised novel. I doubt whether it can ever be really a work of art. But have you never thought of casting a theme from the outset in dramatic instead of narrative form?

Mrs. Harrison. Why should I set myself to master a new art, which has all sorts of disadvantages and disabilities from which my own art is free?

W. A. But which offers all the more splendid triumphs when these disadvantages and disabilities are overcome.

Mrs. Harrison. Material "triumphs" do you mean? "Runs" and royalties?

W. A. These, too; but I was thinking chiefly of the artistic triumph of conquering difficulties and extracting from them the elements of new strength and new beauty.

Mrs. Harrison. And this you think the dramatist can do?

W. A. I am sure of it—just as I am sure that the sculptor, in virtue of the very hardness and recalcitrancy of his material, can attain a certain very noble order of effects denied to the painter.

Mrs. Harrison. Yes—I can understand the fascination of the marble for the sculptor, and I can understand also that the dramatist may be fascinated by the intrinsic, inseparable difficulties of the dramatic form—the difficulties arising, like those of the sculptor, from the very nature of the medium he works in. But then there are so many extrinsic, fortuitous difficulties and annoyances besetting the dramatist's

calling-difficulties that are not really artistic at allthat cannot be overcome by the exercise, but rather by the sacrifice, of art. For one thing, before a play can really live, the playwright must submit to the collaboration of a whole host of people-the actor-manager and other actors, the stage-manager, the scene-painter, and so forth. His work is subjected to all manner of modifications and distortions that have no artistic or logical necessity, but are arbitrary concessions to the idiosyncrasy-and often to the sheer blind prejudiceeither of the interpreters or of the so-called "great public." And even if this collaboration were more rational than it generally is, I confess I shrink from any sort of collaboration whatever, any intrusion between me and my audience. I am by nature and habit "the cat that walked by himself" of Kipling's story-a splendid piece of work, by the way.

W. A. What you say about the worries and annoyances that beset the playwright's path is only too true. I always feel myself a bit of a Mephistopheles when I try to beguile an author into exchanging the sweet seclusion of his study for the Witches' Sabbath of stageland. I don't know whether you observe any of the red fire we were speaking of playing about me just now. Yet, if I had any creative talent whatever, I should certainly be the dupe of my own blandishments. I would rather write one great play than a whole Mudie van-load of successful novels. And I don't think it is the limelight and glitter of the stage that allures me—nor even the glamour of "ten per cent. on the gross,"—but simply the difficulty of

compressing the greatest possible amount of character and emotion into the "two crowded hours of glorious life" allotted to the dramatist.

Mrs. Harrison. It may be a confession of epicureanism, but the tabloid ideal of art does not appeal to me.

W. A. Yet I am sure you feel the attraction of difficulty, else you would never have written Sir Richard Calmady. It interested me to notice, the other day, that when you wrote The Wages of Sin,—how long ago was that?

Mrs. Harrison. Thirteen years.

W. A. ——you evidently already had the story of Sir Richard Calmady complete in your mind, even down to the names of the characters and the social setting.

Mrs. Harrison. Oh yes, that is true—poor Dickie Calmady has haunted me for years—I was only waiting for courage to deal with the theme.

W. A. It is the very difficulties of the theme that make me feel that you ought to be attracted by the similar difficulties of drama. Again and again in reading the book, as I saw a particular scene looming ahead, I said to myself, "How can this situation be successfully handled?"—and again and again you come out of it triumphant.

Mrs. Harrison. But are you right in talking of the "similar difficulties of the drama"? Are they not essentially dissimilar? The characteristic difficulties of the drama, I imagine, are mainly mechanical—or shall we say technical?—whereas the difficulties in dealing with Sir Richard Calmady were not so much technical as psychological. At any rate, as I said

before, the art of extreme compression does not appeal to me. I want more space rather than less. I would gladly write a novel in ten volumes, like Sir Charles Grandison, if the public would buy it. And the public would buy it fast enough, if a man of genius arose to write it. I don't believe it is the hurry of life that has begotten the modern episode-novel, but the novelist's lack of power to handle a large theme.

W. A. Do you think, then, that we shall abandon the episode-novel, and come back to the long and leisurely biography-novel, like *Pendennis* or *David Copperfield?*

Mrs. Harrison. You are determined to make me prophesy, but I won't be betrayed into it. All I know is that when I read a modern novel I am struck, nine times out of ten, by the excellence of the first conception and the poverty of the working out. They are like rapid sketches for subsequent elaboration rather than completed portraits. Modern writers are for the most part impressionists, because they have not patience, or perhaps power, to be anything else.

W. A. You, I know, work slowly; to judge, at any rate, by the intervals between your books.

Mrs. Harrison. I find that a book, to be really developed, really a work of art, must be written three times over, in three different forms. First, there is, of course, the sketch——

W. A. What does that imply, precisely? Do you mean a mere skeleton, a scenario?

Mrs. Harrison. Oh no, a great deal more than that: a tolerably full outline of the great scenes and of the characters. Then comes a time of misery and confusion, when you are extending and filling in the sketch—completing the book in the rough. And then, at last, you have your reward in the exquisite pleasure of writing the final form.

W. A. And is the third form longer or shorter than the second?

Mrs. Harrison. As a rule, considerably shorter. You of course know a great deal more about your characters than you ultimately find it necessary to tell your readers.

W. A. I seem to remember that some critics, in writing of Sir Richard Calmady, quarrelled with the elaborateness, or rather the frequency, of your descriptions of nature.

Mrs. Harrison. I know of one, at any rate, who did so: who accused me of always "setting a scene" for every emotional crisis, and accompanying every new phase of feeling with a new atmospheric effect. Well, I do not say this critic was wholly wrong; but my answer is simply that I cannot help it. Personally, I am always acutely conscious of my surroundings, and I cannot help transferring this consciousness to my characters. I suppose I never spent five minutes in a room without being able, at any reasonable interval of time, to draw a plan of that room and describe to you almost every object in it.

W. A. Even if, all the time you have been in the room, your mind has been more or less intensely preoccupied with other things than the mere still-life picture?

Mrs. Harrison. My mind would probably register the still-life picture all the more minutely and vividly if it were the scene, say, of some dramatic interview or emotional experience. This habit of observation is a great source of pleasure to me, but often, of course, a great discomfort as well. I do not consciously look, but I cannot help seeing. I attribute it to the early training given me by my father. In all our walks with him, he was always teaching us how to use our eyes.

W. A. I sincerely envy you. I am one of those people who are born with their eyes turned inwards. I can say, like Charles Lamb, that if one fine morning the sun rose in the west, while all the world was gasping with astonishment, I should go about my business unperturbed, wondering only what other people saw to wonder at.

Mrs. Harrison. Does not that help to account, perhaps, for your partiality for the stage? If you are not very sensitive to environment and atmosphere, you are naturally not much troubled by the lack of atmosphere—I don't mean lack of ventilation, though that, too, is bad enough—which some of us find so distressing in the theatre.

W. A. It is true that you cannot employ what Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy" on the stage, or only within narrow limits. The sympathy of nature would seem too cheap and mechanical if we knew that it was worked by the electrician at the switchboard. But does not this criticism react upon what is in reality the equally mechanical use of the same device in fiction?

Mrs. Harrison. I am afraid I don't agree. It is a matter of daily experience that our moods are either

in harmony or out of harmony with nature. Why, then, should the novelist scruple to reproduce that daily experience?

W. A. That sounds reasonable, certainly. Yet the nature-descriptions of some novelists always remind me of Calverley's

I must tell you again it was glorious weather— Rhymes are so scarce in this world of ours.

It seems as though their passion for nature was begotten of their poverty, not of rhymes but of ideas.

Mrs. Harrison. You are as indifferent as Dr. Johnson to the "sweet influences" of nature, or affect to be so-I don't know which. Can you imagine what Hawthorne would have been-that great master of psychological romance-without his keen and unflagging consciousness of the natural environment of his creations? He, surely, suffered from no penury of ideas. Or, to take an instance nearer home, think of Thomas Hardy! Is not his exquisite eye for nature an integral part of his genius? It is more than an "eye" for nature—it is an instinctive, intimate sympathy, like that of some sylvan creature of the old mythology. When he draws his fine, soft, silver-point Wessex landscapes, does he seem to you to be merely "setting the scene" for this or that situation? Or, conversely, can you conceive the Blackmore Vale of Tess or the Egdon Heath of The Return of the Native reproduced in canvas and size, with "property" heather, and meadows of electric-green matting? No, no: give me the freedom of the novel, for choice!

- W. A. Both the men you mention are in my eyes not so much novelists as poets—great poets—and their treatment of nature is in nothing more admirable than in its discretion.
- Mrs. Harrison. I do not admit the force of the distinction you draw. Surely all serious fiction is of the nature of poetry, and what is admirable in Hawthorne and Hardy ought to be at any rate permissible in others, always assuming that they can do it reasonably well.
- W. A. I think I meant, as regards Hardy, that he has, almost literally, created his own domain; that whereas in the case of most novelists we can readily take for granted the common earth on which their people move, Hardy's characters, on the other hand, belong in a peculiar sense to the peculiar soil from which they seem to have sprung. We could not conceive his fauna apart from his flora. The Jungle Book presupposes the jungle.

Mrs. Harrison. If you only mean that Hardy is intensely local and depends for his effects on an ever-present sense of locality, I quite agree; but I wholly disagree if you mean that Hardy's Wessex is "created" in the sense of fabricated—that his peasants, as shallow critics are fond of declaring, are unreal.

W. A. Oh no; that was not what I meant.

Mrs. Harrison. Surely not. I, having lived the greater part of my life in the country, know how absolutely true Hardy is. If you suppose that the country labourer leads a stupid and unemotional existence, it is merely because you have never been very closely in touch with him. He is cautious and sus-

picious. He has, moreover, a certain half-pitving contempt for you, because you have got your knowledge of things in general from books, instead of at first hand. from nature and practical experience. He is not going to give himself away. But his inner life is intense, his speculations daring, his sense of humour generally keen. Very much of all this Hardy has succeeded in putting on paper. He has drawn the English peasant from the inside as in my opinion no other English novelist has. We of the educated classes are pleased to suppose that we are the favoured of the gods, and that drama, let alone wisdom, begins and ends with ourselves. In point of fact, the middle-class is the dull, the undramatic class, because it has lost its primitive The upper and the labouring classes in England are really the raw material of the dramatist, because they have retained a wholesome relation to nature, an admirable possibility of savagery. It is rather on our own social level that "le soir tous les chats sont gris." What some persons scoff at as melodrama in Dickens, for instance, is very often simple truth. In the labouring classes, both of town and country, as any one can see who reads the police reports and assize news, sentimentality and brutality go amazingly hand in hand. There are greater heroisms and blacker vices among the poor than among persons of moderate income and good education, sheep and the goats are more clearly marked off from each other. There is far more romance in Rotherhithe than in West Kensington.

W. A. When you say that, what do you mean by "romance"?

Mrs. Harrison. Why, life at its greatest fulness—at its highest emotional intensity.

W. A. Ah! that, now, is what I mean by drama—— Mrs. Harrison. Oh dear, oh dear! are we getting

back to the theatre?

back to the theatre

W. A. No, no: forgive me. I see my Mephistophelean wiles are lost upon you, and I think it is time that I should retire discomfited.

Mrs. Harrison. When you show me an ideal theatre—

W. A. ——with complete meteorological machinery and aërial perspectives at discretion——

Mrs. Harrison. ——I may think about yielding to that fascination of difficulty which you dwell on so eloquently. In the meantime, good-bye—or rather, au revoir.

November, 1902.



MR. SIDNEY LEE.

From a photograph by Fradelle & Young, London.

Conversation XII. With Mr. Sidney Lee.

Scene: Mr. Lee's study in Kensington. Time: A summer afternoon.

W. A. So you have returned untomahawked and unscalped from the land of the Baconians?

Mr. Lee. I have returned from a most enjoyable visit to America, if that is what you mean. But, joking apart, it is quite a mistake to call the United States the land of the Baconians. That is what I have had to keep on telling people ever since I came back.

W. A. What about the man, then, who wrote you before you started, saying that he was going to meet you on the quay and transfix you with the lance of pure reason?

Mr. Lee. Oh, I don't mean to say that there are not cranks there, as there are here. But the more I travelled, and the more people I came in contact with, the more I realised that they—the cranks—are taken less seriously there than here. That is my genuine and deliberate belief. I really heard very little of Bacon, except in the form of expressions of surprise that respectable papers and magazines in this country should concern themselves at all about Baconianism.

W. A. Was that so even in the West?

Mr. Lee. More particularly in the West. Ignatius Donnelly, you know, was Senator from Minnesota, and out in the West they knew him, and knew how much attention to pay to him.

- W. A. No Senator is without honour save in his own country, eh? But what about Mrs. Gallup? Does she actually exist? Or is her real name Harris?
- Mr. Lee. Oh, she exists, genuinely enough—in Detroit, I understand. But no one, as they say over there, "takes any stock in her." She has attracted much more attention in Middlesex than in her native Michigan. That is the odd thing—that Baconianism should apparently be gaining ground here, just as it has been found out in America. I assure you it is on the down grade there.
- W. A. But can you quite trust your impression on that point? The people you came most in contact with, I presume, were the most highly-educated class of Americans. You went from university to university, where you were least of all likely to run up against Baconians.
- Mr. Lee. Education is not an infallible prophylactic against the disease. Several of the people who have caught it on this side are men whom you certainly can't call uneducated. Besides, I lectured to popular as well as academic audiences.
 - W. A. And never found Baconianism cropping up?
 - Mr. Lee. Not recognisably.
- W. A. I should have expected the presidents of Bacon Clubs to insist on "heckling" you after the lectures.
- Mr. Lee. No, no—nothing of the sort occurred. I don't believe Bacon Clubs exist. In fact, I don't know that I encountered more than one live Baconian in the flesh.

- W. A. The gentleman on the quay, with the lance of pure reason?
- Mr. Lee. No; but a lawyer in Boston. Through him I received a formal challenge to hold a public disputation with a Baconian champion who has written a big book on the subject.
 - W. A. A challenge which you declined?
- Mr. Lee. Of course. I don't see that there is anything to dispute about. The Baconians build a labyrinth of fallacies, and then challenge you to get out of it. The only reply is that you never were in it—that the whole structure is remote from common-sense and has no basis in reason.
- W. A. You should have done like my friend Professor B——, of Harvard: you met him, I dare say?

 Mr. Lee. Oh yes, I know him well.
- W. A. He told me that almost every term, after the opening lecture of his course, some freshman from the country comes up to him and asks whether he does not really think there is a good deal to be said for the Baconian theory. This occurs so regularly that B—has adopted a formula to meet the case. He says, "Come to me at the end of the course, my friend, and I'll discuss that question with you then—if you still want to discuss it." You might have invited the Baconian champion to attend your Lowell lectures, and then come and discuss with you—if he still wanted to.
- Mr. Lee. But B——'s freshmen had not written books in two big volumes to prove that Shakespeare was Bacon. They had not staked their credit on the theory. It is hopeless to think of transfixing such a man with the lance of pure reason; and I, for one,

didn't attempt it. Of course, so far as my lectures dealt with Shakespeare, I endeavoured to make the man real to my audiences, as one naturally would. But it was with no hope of confuting Baconians.

W. A. "So far as your lectures dealt with Shake-speare," you say? You had other subjects, then?

Mr. Lee. Oh yes, indeed I had. Of my eight Lowell lectures only two were on Shakespeare.

W. A. What were the others?

Mr. Lee. Well, I began with a lecture on the uses of National Biography—and on that score, by the way, I used to get rather "heckled," in private. People wanted to know why Washington, for instance, was not included in the Dictionary, and I found it difficult to set up a logical principle for omitting him. If I said we included only people born within the British Empire as at present existing, they met me with Alexander Hamilton, who was born in Barbadoes, and asked why he was omitted.

W. A. I should think you would have given much more offence by including than by excluding the Fathers of the Republic. If you had included Washington, you would logically have had to include every notable American born before 1776. Why don't the Americans produce their own Dictionary of National Biography?

Mr. Lee. Well, you know, as long ago as the eighteen-forties, they had a Library of American Biography, edited by Jared Sparks, in twenty-five volumes. That was proportionally on a larger scale than ours. As a matter of fact, there is a good deal of talk about a dictionary on the plan of ours, and people consulted

me on the point more than once. My advice was always to wait. There is no hurry. Let time sift their great men a bit. There is no fear of the records perishing. Local celebrities are embalmed in local archives, and can always be dug out when necessary. It would be almost impossible as yet to determine the just proportions of a Dictionary of American Biography on any large scale.

- W. A. When one thinks of Stedman's American Anthology, with its five hundred and sixty poets, the prospect of a dictionary in which political, commercial, and religious notabilities should be admitted with similar liberality is certainly rather appalling. Might not each State have its own local dictionary, from which a National Dictionary might be selected, like a sort of Senate of the Dead?
- Mr. Lee. Local patriotism is certainly very strong, and is carefully cultivated. For instance, in the State of Ohio, which is just celebrating its hundredth year of existence, I was interested to find that in some, at any rate, of the public schools, instruction in history began, not, as in the old days, with Weltgeschichte, nor even with the history of the United States, but with the history of the State of Ohio, pure and simple.
- W. A. Is not that the most modern theory of the way to teach history—to start with your own parish, and radiate backwards to Egypt and Mesopotamia?
- Mr. Lee. Then, again, to show how national traditions are cherished, I remember, at a dinner-party at Philadelphia, quite an animated discussion arising between two business men as to the respective merits of Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln, as orators.

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Both of the men were comparatively young. Neither of them could possibly have heard either Webster or Lincoln. The question was simply one of national tradition—yet they grew quite warm and excited over it. Imagine two London stockbrokers getting into a heated argument over the oratory of Sir Robert Peel and—whom shall we say?

W. A. Disraeli?

Mr. Lee. No, he is too near our own time;—say Canning!

W. A. I fancy the question of oratory has a peculiar interest for Americans, who are all more or less bound to be public speakers. But, talking of oratory, let us return to your Lowell lectures. What were your other subjects besides National Biography?

Mr. Lee. I gave lectures on More, Sidney, Raleigh, Spenser, Bacon—the author of the *Novum Organum*, not of *Hamlet*—and two on Shakespeare.

W. A. Is the audience at the Lowell lectures popular or academic?

Mr. Lee. Oh, entirely popular. The Lowell Trust is a peculiar institution. It is an endowment founded by one of the Lowell family early in last century and still administered by his descendants. It is at present in the hands of Mr. A. Laurence Lowell, a grandson, I believe, of the founder, who is a distinguished professor at Harvard—Professor of Government in the great Law School there. By the conditions of the trust, the lectures are open to the public gratis, the tickets of admission to each course being distributed a week before the course opens, on the principle of "first come first served." I believe people wait for hours in a long

queue for the distribution; and of course some tickets are secured by speculators, who sell them for what they will fetch. Then, again, there is a rule that places not occupied by ticket-holders three minutes before the time the lecture is advertised to begin may be taken by any one who wants them; and you see a crowd of people who have not secured tickets waiting a long time in a queue at the hall for this second chance of admission.

W. A. Is there a Lowell Institute building?

Mr. Lee. No—the lectures are given in the Huntington Hall of the Boston School of Technology, one of the best-equipped institutions of its kind.

W. A. Should you say that lecturing, on the whole, retains its traditional popularity in the United States?

Mr. Lee. Certainly, as far as my experience goes. And, what is more, in spite of all that America has done and is doing for science, the literary lecture still holds its own against the scientific lecture, much better than in England.

W. A. What was your most popular subject?

Mr. Lee. Oh, Shakespeare, undoubtedly. You find everywhere a really intense interest in Shakespeare. I don't think I visited a single town where I did not come across some special Shakespeare student and enthusiast, generally an extremely well-read and intelligent man. For instance, here is a book by a distinguished American senator on Shakespeare's legal knowledge, which was given me by a host of mine in the West, an ideal Shakespearean scholar, a friend of the author.

W. A. A professor?

- Mr. Lee. No, a United States circuit judge, residing in Madison, Wisconsin. He makes it a rule to read Shakespeare right through every year. Almost every Saturday evening, he and his wife and daughter read a play together. And his reading is no mere mechanical habit—he understands and appreciates, ponders over cruxes, and knows his way about in Shakespearean literature. He was perhaps the most interesting specimen of his type that I met; but the type abounds. Some people, indeed, make Shakespeare an exclusive hobby, and declare themselves unable to read any other modern literature.
- W. A. Now tell me—do you believe this interest in Shakespeare to be purely literary? Or has it any political significance? Is it Shakespeare the world-poet that attracts them, or Shakespeare the Anglo-Saxon institution?
- Mr. Lee. Mainly the world-poet, no doubt; but I think there is a certain tribal element in the cult as well. Shakespeare is, so to speak, a portable historic monument, who acquires a new value in a land where historic monuments are scarce. Enthusiasm for Shakespeare is certainly not confined to travelled Americans—not by any means. But I always found it accompanied—quite naturally—by a keen interest in England and things English. I remember being particularly struck with this at Columbus, Ohio, where I was invited to deliver a lecture on Shakespeare as the guest of the State University. Not one of the professors or the trustees whom I happened to meet there had ever been in Europe—
 - W. A. That was surely very surprising.

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Mr. Lee. It was the case, at any rate—and I was all the more impressed by the keen interest, the personal curiosity one might almost say, that they all displayed with regard to England. And that feeling I found very general. Here and there, even, the curiosity was tinged with sentiment. One lady, I remember, said to me, "When I think of England I feel homesick." One of my hosts at Columbus, who had never crossed the Atlantic, remarked that he always thought of England as "home."

W. A. Well, now, the impression I have generally received, both in America and from Americans in Europe, is rather that of a surprising indifference towards England—not unfriendliness, but indifference in the literal sense of the word. The majority of Americans, I should say, do not differentiate between England and other parts of Europe, as we do between America and other foreign countries. Professor Barrett Wendell, I remember, says somewhere or other, "there are plenty of sensible Americans who really feel less strange in Paris than in London." The identity of language seems to mean surprisingly little to them. We are "foreigners" in their eyes, much more distinctly than they are in ours.

Mr. Lee. Yes, I know what you mean. It has more than once happened to me to be casually reminded that I was a foreigner in the eyes of my hosts, when, for my own part, I had really forgotten it. But I can scarcely agree as to their not taking a special and peculiar interest in England.

W. A. You were not much in political circles, I suppose?

Mr. Lee. To some extent, in Washington; but I did not hear foreign politics discussed in much detail. But, by the bye, I came across one odd little indication of political feeling. After one of my Lowell lectures, a man came up to me and said he had attended these lectures for I don't know how many years, and always liked to shake the lecturer by the hand. After this preamble he looked at me hard and said, "Tell me one thing—why is your Government always trying to get the better of ours?" I protested that I wasn't aware of the circumstance, and consequently couldn't explain it. But he wouldn't accept a plea of not guilty. "Oh, you know it well enough," he said, and went off evidently regarding me as an accessory after the fact to the crimes of the British Cabinet.

W. A. I wonder whether he was a type or an eccentric?

Mr. Lee. A type of a certain class, I have no doubt.
W. A. Did not the interviewers try to "draw" you on politics?

Mr. Lee. I remember one interviewer reading out to me from manuscript an elaborate statement to the effect that the so-called alliance between the Governments of England and Germany in the Venezuelan affair was warmly resented by the English people. I declined to express an opinion, but was credited in the newspaper next day with having spontaneously uttered my interviewer's written statement. My experience of interviewers showed me that as a rule they know little about one, or one's subjects, or one's interests, but are possessed with the idea that one's sole function in the universe is to provide them with a certain tale of "copy."

One gentleman descended upon me at a most inconvenient hour, said he was sorry to be so late, but he had been kept at a baseball match, and then, while confessing he had the haziest notions of my history, bade me talk to him about myself for sufficient length of time to enable him to execute his editor's order to fill a column with my exploits in the next day's paper. Then there is the lady-interviewer, who almost always asks you what you think of Kipling, and whether Stephen Phillips is popular in England, and what are the state and prospects of the romantic drama. But on the whole I got on well with the reporters. There was only one gentleman in Philadelphia whom I seem to have succeeded in offending. He asked me, "What do you think of our hustle?" I said, "What is that?" "Why, our hustle," he repeated. "Where is it?" I replied: "I haven't seen it." So he went away looking much disconcerted, and next day there appeared a sarcastic article in his paper, headed "A Disappointed Visitor," making me responsible for a series of absurd misconceptions about American life which had never entered my head.

W. A. No wonder—you were treading on Philadelphia's tenderest corn: New Yorkers, you know, are always gibing at it as a dead-alive provincial town. But what *did* you think of the far-famed American hustle?

Mr. Lee. I thought, what your tone suggests, that it was a good deal overrated. Of course the North is hustling in comparison with the South; and that, I take it, is one of the main reasons of the suspicion

and dislike which the Southerner still feels for the "Yankee."

W. A. How far South did you go?

Mr. Lee. As far as Raleigh, North Carolina—far enough to realise the radical difference between Northern and Southern civilisation. For instance, one European institution that you very soon meet with in the South is the beggar.

W. A. Black?

Mr. Lee. No, no—the white beggar, I have here a "copy of verses" handed about on the cars of a branch line in the centre of North Carolina, by as whining a blind beggar as any the Old World could produce.

W. A. And did you form any view upon the Negro Question?

Mr. Lee. Only the pretty obvious view, that it is a very difficult one. I was particularly struck by the evidence of personal antipathy to the negro even among many liberal-minded people in the North. Only to-day I was lunching with a very cultivated and enlightened American lady, who, after speaking very highly of President Roosevelt, added, "But I can never forgive him for having invited Booker T. Washington to lunch at the White House." I remember one day walking with a Yale professor, when we passed a negro student of the university, quietly dressed in the undergraduate style of fashion, and smoking a pipe of a shape popular among undergraduates. The professor spoke of him as an able fellow, but called my attention in scornful tones to the man's costume and pipe, adding the

bantering comment, "I suppose he thinks by arraying himself like that to get us to mistake him for a white man." It evidently cost the professor some effort to do the negro intellectual justice. Yet I am told the negroes at the great Northern universities get on very amicably with the white students.

W. A. Did you not find any traces of distinctly negrophil feeling?

Mr. Lee. Oh yes-oddly enough, at my farthest west point, Des Moines, Iowa. I there made the acquaintance of a newspaper editor, a most hospitable, intelligent, and well-informed man, who resented the rising cry against the negro in the North, and such utterances as that of President Hadley of Yale, who has declared for depriving him of the franchise. To show me how unfairly the coloured man is treatedhow every upward path in life is blocked to him-Mr. D- told me of a poor young negro of good ability and excellent character, in whose education he had interested himself. The young man passed with distinction through the Pharmaceutical College, or some such institution, and was engaged as dispenser at a large drug store in Des Moines, belonging to a man who shared my friend's liberal views. He was thoroughly qualified, and gave perfect satisfaction; but when a change came in the proprietorship of the establishment, the negro dispenser was at once dismissed, for no other reason but his colour. He tried in vain to get like employment elsewhere-no one would have him. So his education was utterly thrown away, and he had to become a porter or 'longshoreman to keep body and soul together.

W. A. It certainly does seem as though that sort of treatment must intensify the race difficulty rather than help to smooth it away. A great negro exodus to the native heath of the race—a sort of African Zionist movement—is the remedy that appeals to the imagination. But I suppose that is chimerical.

Mr. Lee. What must really be looked to, I take it, is the education of the general body of the negro population, up to the point which shall compel the white man to acknowledge the black to be on the same plane of humanity with himself. But that will be a long business; although I do not think its ultimate achievement beyond the power of educational experts, whose efficiency in America is very great.

W. A. Talking of education in the narrower sense, what was your general impression of the American universities?

Mr. Lee. I had not time, of course, to look closely into their workings; but no one can fail to be struck by the huge opportunity that lies before American educationists, and the general energy and zeal with which they are taking advantage of it. When one thinks of that immense population, all eager for improvement, one feels as though the making of the future lay within the scope of the American colleges, more, perhaps, than within that of any other educational institutions.

W. A. And you think the energy and zeal you speak of are in the main rightly directed?

Mr. Lee. In the main, I have no doubt of it—especially as I think there are traces of a reaction setting in against the exclusive cultivation of German

perhaps been a tendency on the literary side of study to make too much of a fetish of mere philological

thoroughness, to the neglect of the "breath and finer

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spirit" of literature. But in English scholarship nothing could be more valuable than the work that is being done by such men as Professor Kittredge of Harvard. one of the finest English scholars of our time, or Professor Woodberry of Columbia, or Professors Manly and Frederick Ives Carpenter of Chicago, or Professor Schelling of Philadelphia, or Professor Gummere of Haverford, to mention only the first names that occur

W. A. Did you see anything of the women's colleges? Mr. Lee. Oh yes; I lectured at all the leading ones-at Bryn Mawr, for instance; at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie; at Wellesley, near Boston; and at Smith College, Northampton. At all I had splendid audiences -often as many as nine hundred, I was told.

W. A. All women-students?

Mr. Lee. All women-students and professors, who usually include a few men; but at Wellesley my large audience was entirely composed of ladies.

W. A. I remember going through one of the residential halls for ladies attached to Chicago University, and being struck with the exact similarity of the girls' rooms to what one would find at Newnham or Somer-Books, pictures, photographs, decorations-all were precisely the same as an English girl of the same class would gather around her.

Mr. Lee. Yes, there is a great similarity between the girl-undergraduates of the two countries; but I

think the American girl-students, taking them all round, are keener at their work, more self-possessed, and at the same time more ingenuous and less shy than English girl-undergraduates are apt to be.

W. A. I wonder whether that distinction does not also apply as between the male undergraduates of the two countries? But don't let us stray into generalisations on national character, which seem to me of all things the most unprofitable. Who can compress a nation into a formula? Talking of undergraduates, I was amused the other day by a Yale boy's impressions of Oxford, where he had been staying for a week. He spoke with evidently heartfelt commiseration of the material hardships of an Oxford undergraduate's life—the dark, draughty rooms, the cold tub in place of the luxurious bathroom, and all sorts of other discomforts. "I tell you," he said, "we should think we were roughing it mighty hard if we lived as those Oxford fellows do." The idea of Oxford as a school of Spartan endurance tickled me a good deal, when I thought of the life that many men used to live at the Scotch universities in my time. Evidently my Yale friend had no notion of cultivating the Muses on a diet of oatmeal.

Mr. Lee. Yet one hears a good deal of the heroic shifts to which poor students resort in America, in order to carry on their college course. At all the great universities there are numerous students (sons of very poor parents) who devote every moment of leisure to manual labour (often of a very menial kind) in order to earn the means of a scanty subsistence while pursuing their studies. The many stories that I heard of the

hardships which these "working" students, as they are often called, cheerfully faced for the sake of academic training must excite the warmest sympathy. They clearly prove how widely the ambition to enjoy the advantages of a university education is diffused in all grades of the American population. I myself saw little of the individual life of undergraduates, and went more among the rich students than among the poor. I am bound to say I was struck by the luxury of some of the club-houses of the rich undergraduates. I saw some that at Oxford would be considered almost immorally sumptuous.

W. A. Probably these were the club-houses of sons of millionaires, and were endowed by the millionaires.

Mr. Lee. I don't think that is the explanation. It seems to me that we are apt to exaggerate the proportional influence of the millionaire in American life. Looking at the United States from this distance, we think of the concentration of wealth in a few hands as the great phenomenon of the age; but when you get there, you find the diffusion of wealth at least equally remarkable.

W. A. Take care! If you express these views too freely, you will find yourself quoted in a Birmingham leaflet as a champion of Protection. Perhaps you are one—let us avoid the subject. You cannot deny, at any rate, that the millionaire is a potent factor in American life. Have I not heard of your proposing legislative measures to prevent him from draining off to America all the bibliographical treasures of England?

Mr. Lee. I don't know that I ever went so far as that. It is true I have suggested that early editions

of the English classics should be regarded as heirlooms, and have remarked that heirlooms do not pass to cousins, until the direct line is extinct.

W. A. There is something to be said for a law, such as they have in Italy, to prohibit the export of antiquities.

Mr. Lee. Well, I confess I have come rather to repent of such dog-in-the-manger sentiments since I have seen the care bestowed by American collectors on their treasures, and the liberal use they make of them. And, to return to the point we were discussing a moment ago, the American absorption of early editions is not so much a sign of the concentration as of the diffusion of riches. No doubt the great American collectors are very wealthy men, but they are not the millionaires of whom we read in the papers. Some of them, indeed, collect with a distinct eye to business—to placing their capital in sound securities. One of them said to me, "I would willingly give £3000 for a perfect First Folio Shakespeare, and think I was doing well by my family."

W. A. At that rate, no wonder prices go up.

Mr. Lee. Oh, such men as Mr. Robert Hoe of New York—the owner probably of the finest private library in America—or Mr. Marsden Perry of Providence, do not care what they give for a book they really want. Many unique editions have found their way to America. For instance, the only known copy of Caxton's Sir Thomas Malory is in Mr. Hoe's library in New York. In my article on the poet Robert Southwell in the Dictionary of National Biography, I stated that the only perfect copy of his Fourfold Meditation of the

Four Last Things had been sold at Sotheby's in 1881, and was "not now traceable": I found it in New York, in the library of Mr. Hoe.

W. A. It looks, then, as if the centre of scholarship, as of so many other things, bade fair to be transferred across the Atlantic, and English editors would have to go to America to do their collations, instead of American editors coming to England.

Mr. Lee. We are some way yet from that consummation. But I certainly think there is one legitimate protective measure that we ought to adopt—we ought to increase the endowment of our great public libraries, the British Museum and the Bodleian, in order to give them some reasonable chance in competing with the American collector.

W. A. Tell me—what was the result of your census of First Folios? Do we still hold the majority?

Mr. Lee. Oh yes; the balance is still largely in our favour.

W. A. Good! I breathe again! So there is no immediate danger of a Chicago millionaire making a "corner" in them, putting the whole impression into a machine, and bringing them out Bacon at the other end.

Mr. Lee. I assure you such gibes are quite beside the mark. Chicago is at least as sane as London on the Bacon question, if question it can be called.

W. A. Oh, I don't doubt it. But you see when a Scotchman has once got a joke into his head, it is not so easy to get it out again. All the same, I accept your assurance, and go on my way rejoicing. Good-bye!

REAL CONVERSATIONS

Mr. Lee. Good-bye; and believe me there's nothing like spending a few months in America for teaching you the pointlessness of some of our stock jokes at her expense.

W. A. That is quite my own experience.

Exit.

July, 1903.

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THE END

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